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## Five Indian English Poets: A Review

### Five Indian English Poets

Editors: Prof. R. A. Singh and Dr. Ashok Kumar Yadav

Paradise Publishers, Jaipur, India. 2014.

Price: Rs.1395. pp.281. Hardbound

### Reviewed By:

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With this book in hand I remember another book titled, *Discourses on Five Indian Poets In English*, Edited by K. V. Dominic and published by Authorspress, New Delhi in 2011. The five poets discussed were Keki N Daruwala, Shiv K Kumar, Pronab Kumar Majumdar, Syed Ameeruddin and Aju Mukhopadhyay.

Whereas the poets and editor in the above book were from different parts of India, half of them south based, the poets discussed in the book under review are based on North India. They are Stephen Gill, Arbind Kumar Choudhary, D. C. Chambial, Suresh Chandra Dwivedi and Bijoy Kant Dubey. Whereas four critics have discussed on Gill, five critics on the poems of Chambial and Dwivedi and three on Dubey, seven critics have discussed on Choudhary's poetry which includes two essays by S. C. Dwivedi. Choudhary himself has discussed poetry of four other poets. Choudhary has two essays on D. C. Chambial's poetry. So there are interchanges of essays by poet-critics.

Each poet has some of their poems, 8 in most cases, published under the head "Creation". Then begins the chapters of "Criticism" with brief bio-notes of the critics. This arrangement seems good but the beginning of each chapter anywhere in the pages may not seem good to many. However, a highlight on each poet seems to be in order.

The central point of discussion on Gill has been on his birth, biography and settlement in Canada. The title of Aju Mukhopadhyay's work on Gill is "Stephen Gill: Indian by birth Canadian by Choice." Gill's Indian experience seems to be about the time of the partition of India and the riots he witnessed as child. Bhaskar Roy Barman also has emphasized on these points. Critics have discussed on his poems too with dove as the well known symbol of peace. Gill settled in Canada with great esteem for them and continues to stay there but have got many books on him and by him published in India as Indian English poet and author. He often flocks with Indian poets. This seems to be his only literary refuge as an Indian English poet. In fact most of the Indian English novelists too depend on India as one of the greatest markets for their books.

Choudhary's poems are short but flashing romance strewn with sometimes obscure, sometimes rare words like, "The savour of the larkspur / Stirs the harbour / Of affaire d'amour / For the raconteur." (Poets /91/Quatrain/149) quoted by Bernard M Jackson while complimenting him with, "I must compliment the writer on his phenomenal knowledge of little-used English words and terminology . . ." (Poets /92)

Kurt F. Svatek says, "Choudhary considers his poems a brain-children . . . . His way of writing is clear and powerful written in a high linguistic level." (Poets /96)

S. C. Dwivedi, while discussing Arbind Choudhary's poetry writes, "Like G. M. Hopkins the poet has propounded his innovative style that may be termed as Arbindonian style." Critic Dwivedi has coined the word "Arbindonian" elsewhere also. I have a submission here that

Arbind, or “Arvind” as it is pronounced and written in North India, has no “O” in it. Another thing is that, the vowel is not pronounced in many names in spite of its existence in their spelling; “Sadhana” is pronounced as “Sadhna”. It could be “Arbindian” or “Arbindean”. More so, as it has resonance with the name of a great poet and pioneer of Indian English Poetry, Sri Aurobindo, though he did not write poetry knowing any such branch of English as ‘Indian English’. His name is made of letters as they suit the pronunciation in his native land, Bengal, as it was known at that time. Sri Aurobindo’s works are sometimes referred to as “Aurobindonean”. It creates confusion between the two names. There is little point of comparison between the poets.

Choudhary’s quatrains, divided in 11 sections, have been published at the beginning of the chapter dealing with his poems. Out of these I select one which shows another aspect of his poetic quality, the social consciousness; “A wolf in sheep’s clothing / Sheds crocodile tears for the suffering. / O Blood sucker of the sufferer! /Your name is Modern Leader. (Leader /Poets /54)

“Like P. B. Shelley D. C. Chambial has a passion for reforming the world . . . Like Shelley, love is the main theme of his lyrics which are marked by an intense sincerity of passion, rich music and beautiful imagery. In his song there is a breath of the eternal spirit”, Arbind K Choudhary writes. (Poets /157)

Jaykesh Yadav writes in his “S. C. Dwivedi As A Poet of Indian Wisdom”, “Dr. Dwivedi writes for the betterment of the society. Human relationships are his prime concern. For him literature is *Sabhyata Sameeksha*.” (Poets /243)

And as example he quotes few lines from Dwivedi’s poem which the critic says “Explicates his notion of poetry: ‘Like a pitcher of nectar it contains. /Vedic truths, Upanishadic messages. /The Ideals of Rama and Sita. /Mahatma Gandhi, Indira, Nanak and Kabir. / Like the holy water of Ganges. / Indian poetry embraces all purities all. (38)” (Poets /243)

Biographical elements are put forth while discussing the poems of Bijay Kant Dubey also. Kuheli Chakraborty in her “Bijay Kant Dubey: An Indian English Poet in The Making” writes, “As a poet of Indian English poetry, it is he who represents three states, namely Bihar, Jharkhand and Bengal. The Brahminical consciousness, Upanishadic vision, Puranic stuffs, folktale elements and lessons from the Bhagavadgita are the things which can be found littered into the poetic scribbles and jottings of his works. Coy and shy from his within, an introvert he has led a life of self-abnegation and self-denial as for poetry’s sake.” (Poets /249) She has then listed rows of names of critics who have written or commented on his poems.

*Discourses on Five Indian Poets In English*, as referred earlier, was reviewed by The Hindu on 1 January 2012. The reviewer found it “uneven collection” for they must have considered that the poets were not of equal standard, as found by their critical measuring rod. At least one or two of them were favoured by the establishment but the others weren’t. Some of them were less known in the critic’s generation, it said. “The essays collected in **Discourses on Five Indian Poets** do not display any marked furtherance from the existing, received views on the five poets,” the critic opined. Does it mean that they had fixed views about all the poets discussed though some of them were less known? This clearly proves the discriminating attitude of such media thereby jeopardizing the growth of literature.

However unequal critical world may we live in, one of their comments, “Indiscriminate interpretations of general nature- mostly thematic- arrived at without a serious attempt at close examination of the language and the form of the poem”, seems to carry some meaning whether applicable in respect of their targeted poets or the others. We often find that some British poets

who are popular in India for more than hundred years like Wordsworth, Shelley, Keats and sometimes even older like Milton or Shakespeare, are compared to poets discussed in facile way without much of an in depth study, thereby trying to raise the creative acumen of one's favourite poet to the public view. And this is being done by most of the critics in our milieu. Whatever the efforts are made, the question is, does it become very effective when judging from the circumstances it does not seem that it goes even to moderate number of reading public?

When it does not seem that the students of colleges and universities in India are not very aware of the presence of such Indian English poets, not being a part of their regular curriculum in English literature, how many will venture to buy a book of 281 pages at a cost of Rs.1395 or Rs.1400? Is the English speaking public so interested in poetry, that too not by the famous poets known by hundreds of years of references and publicity, to go for them? There certainly are gaps in our perception of the publishing world and our position in it. When I say this, it is certain that I take myself into it as part of it, in the process. We aren't sure perhaps, where do we actually stand?

It seems true that fiction, specially novel, commands a worldwide reading public, as the critic in *The Hindu* stresses, "Fiction commands - and rightly so - a worldwide reading public", while chuckling at their own cleverness in referring to Rushdie that, "One may recall Rushdie's remark that stirred the hornets' nest that it is only in fiction Indian writing has made a dent on the outside world." What the critic wants to say is that it is their right to support only the novel writers; such novel writers of Indian origin who mostly live in foreign country as they only have become famous, with maybe some rare exceptions and such exceptional writers too shine with the help of such media. My remarks are based on facts. By this I do not wish to mean that such novelists are without worth. They certainly have worth but there might be the others too of the same or more worth. And perhaps the poets, though not very popular, require genuine media support for after all, good poems speak volumes in shorter space; more in far greater and sublime way than the novelist compared to the space they occupy.