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The Indianness in the Poetic Language and Imagery of Toru Dutt, Sarojini Naidu and Kamala Das

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Ever since Prof. K.R.Srinivasa Iyengar published his book *Indian Writing in English* (1960) the subject Indian English literature has acquired a scope and status which it did not enjoy in the past. Today it is believed to have its own distinctiveness that makes it different from British, American, Canadian, Australian literature as well as from African, Caribbean, Pakistan or Malaysian literatures in English. What makes Indian writing in English as Indian literature and not a ransackle outhouse of English literature is the quality of its Indianness, not only in the choice of subject and texture of thought but also in the organisation of material and in the creative use of language. Consequently, it is argued that Indian writer, writing in English, cannot, and should not, try to escape the Indian flavour, and their style must be conditioned by Indian thought and vision as well as by the Indian social and cultural environment in which they have matured. During the past many decades attempts have been made to analyse the Indianness of Indian English writing, but these studies are primarily thematic in nature and confined mostly to fiction. Indian poetry in English has received comparatively little attention because it is supposed to suffer from certain in-built drawbacks like hybrid nature, lack of authenticity, of sensibility and the genuineness of language. This paper is an attempt to make a comparative study of the language, particularly imagery, in the poetry of three major Indian English poets writing in English ____ Toru Dutt, Sarojini Naidu and Kamala Das.

I. INTRODUCTION

Indian English is a dialectical variety of English with marked syntactic, lexical, phonological, and even semantic features and therefore, cannot be grouped with American English, Australian English, British English and other mother tongue varieties of English. The complex fate of an Indian writing in English is, as Raja Rao formulated in *Kanthapura* "to convey in a language that is not one's own the spirit that is one's own" and to communicate Indian modes of feeling and expression through an alien language. Indian English is a non-native, second language variety

and has features of second language variety contributed by the mother -tongues of the poets, by their cultures and by intra-language analogical processes .It lies in the use of such images, metaphors and expressions of social set-up as may be treated as translation equivalents of corresponding expressions in Indian languages.

2.

Indian poets depict Indian culture ,society ,myth and legend in their poerty and it is the use of imagery that helps the poets to portray a situation or a scene graphically and to make it intelligible to the readers .The use of imagery in the poetry of Toru Dutt ,Sarojini Naidu and Kamala Dass reveals that though their basic source is same ,i e, Hindu mythology ,Indian society and Indian flora and fauna , their use of imagary while handling a particular theme in their poetry is different . For example, imagery suffused with philosophical connotations forms a significant aspect of Toru Dutt ; where as in the poetry of Sarojini Naidu images mostly achieve metaphoric and even symbolic dimension .Similarly , in the poetry of Kamala Das, too ,there is a considerable element of mythical ,social and nature imagery , dealt with in a different perspective.

India has received and absorbed in its soil the influences of foreign cultures, chiefly Islamic and Christian; yet the adherence to the fundamentals of traditional Hindu mythology, with its heroes and heroines, who still inspire men of action and thought, has not absolutely been wiped out from the Indian minds. Toru Dutt ,Sarojini Naidu and Kamala Das have embellished their works with mythical imagery ,taken from their glorious epics. This is done either to preserve their traditions ,or to regenerate faith in the confused minds of the people, or just to express their fascination for the past.Toru Dutt, though a converted Christian , is deeply rooted in Indian culture as is obvious from her preference for the mythical imagery taken from the old classics like *The Ramayana* ,*The Mahabharatha*, *The Vishnu Purana*. The mythical images she draws upon in *The Ancient ballads and Legends of Hindustan* stand for the indian ideal of womanhood (sita and Savitri), ideal brother (Lakshman), ideal pupil (Buttoo) , ideal devotee (Prahlad), ideal son (Sindhu). In the poem "Savitri", for example the image of Savitri presents an ideal Indian woman's total forgetfulness and devotion, her chastity and morality, her affection and good behaviour with her in-laws. Such an image serves as a model for the modern Indian woman who has gradually lost her cultural identity due to the influence of the West. Toru Dutt's mythical imagery is didactic in purpose and thematic in treatment.

In Sarojini Naidu's poetry there is a complete harmony between man ,nature and myth. Nature and myth are one and the same thing to Sarojini Naidu. In "Harvest Hymn", she hails the earth as Prithvi, the sun as Surya, the rain as Varuna ,and the creator of the universe as Brahma. The image of the lotus is associated with the legend of Lakshman, lotus-born ; Saraswati, lotus-seated; and Buddha ,lotus-throned. In" To a Buddha Seated on a Lotus" the poet contrasts the peace, and tranquility of the lotus throne to the travail, the heat and the unrest of the times. The myth image that Kamala Das frequently employs in her poems is that of Krishna, as a symbol for the culmination in the pursuit of ideal lover .She uses this image from an Indian woman's point of view:

Vasudeva lives on in every woman's mind

and the flute luring her

from home and her husband

(p.48)

Kamala Das's pursuit for ideal partener ends in the discovery of Krishna .Sarojini Naidu has transfered love as personal desire into divine love, especially in the poems with folk themes where she employs Radha- Krishna myth as a background ("Village Song", "The Flute Player of Brindaban", "Song to Radha--the Milk maid")

Nature imagery figures pervasively in the poetry of Toru Dutt, Sarojini Naidu and Kamala Das . Toru Dutt uses nature imagery too for didactic purpose .Sometimes she is melancholic ,suggestive and Hellinic in the treatment of her nature imagery ."Our Casuarina Tree", inspired by Wordsworth's "Yew Trees" sings of the magnificance and beauty of the tree which has left deep impression on her mind with its splendour , with which her sweet memories of childhood are associated. Many of Toru Dutt's nature images are sensual and colourful. With Sarojini the nature images are always the most frequent especially those related to the spring, animals and heavenly bodies. Her nature images are more general, while those of Toru Dutt are particular.Sarojini like Toru Dutt feels a complete harmony between human life and life of nature.Some of Sarojini's images have mythical associations .For instance, she calls serpents as seers and symbols of ancient culture, in tune with Indian tradition. ("The Festival of Serpents"). However, Kamala Das does not

mythicize snakes. In her case images related to snakes are used merely as similes ,as in "The Stone Age", the hurtful hand of her husband is compared to a hooded snake . Similarly, the sea image is viewed both by Sarojini Naidu and Kamala Das as the mother and nourisher in the Indian context ,but the former goes to the extent of calling it a goddess. ("The Festival of the Serpents") Kamala Das's nature images do not portray a nature scene as we find in Toru Dutt and Sarojini Naidu. As Sarojini Naidu uses dominantly the image of spring , revealing her faith in hope and life ; Kamala Das has a preference for the image of summer ,denoting the fire of lust in which she burns.

All the three poets use imagery of social context pertaining to Indian social scenes .There are a number of images scattered over here and there in *The Ancient Ballads* that express the Indian social life and give reflection on certain social problems .The hard life of widowhood is alarmed in these lines :

*And think upon the dreadful curse
Of widowhood ; the vigils , the fasts
And penances , no life is worse
Than hopeless life* (P.46)

However , Sarojini Naidu excels the other two poets in depicting the various crucial and important aspects of Indian social set up . *The Sceptred Flute* opens with a social scene poem , " Planquin Bearers" , portraying a scene common in the 19th century India , when noble ladies would visit places in veiled ' palkies ' ,beared by bearers who usually sang in rhythmic harmony with their footsteps . Sarojini's social images are secularly harmonized and communally balanced. Her social images are mostly pertaining to the middle class . Images of cremation , funeral pyre and burning recur in the poetry of Kamala Das . "The Sea-Shore" presents the image of consuming fire of funeral pyre with the help of visual-auditory images :

*On some evenings I drive past the cremation ground
And seem to hear the crunch of bones in those vulgar
Mouth of fire.* (p.33)

We cannot think of a non Indian poet employing images of funeral pyre to convey the nuances of meaning .Besides, in Hindu mythology fire or 'agni' is of central importance . In "Descendents" the image of fire is used as the final culmination of the body into ashes that is formless:

...as child to the mother's arms

We shall give ourselves to the fire

3. Conclusion

These Indian poets depict Indian society in English language to present a kind of variety to the European audience .Their writing is the portrait of Indian culture ; it has Indianness in its roots. All the three poets use English language with ease and confidence , though it cannot be neglected that sometimes the language they use seems strange and difficult not because words change their meaning ,but because the choice of words is unusual. One not only comes across some lexical deviations in the poetry of Toru Dutt , Sarojini Naidu and Kamala Das but also notices the following features in their diction: extension of meaning, creation of compound words ,borrowings from Indian languages , hybrid formation and idiosyncratic translations. However, when an Indian English poet seeks to bend English language to his own purpose, he does not do it to create an Indian English , nor to reveal that quintessence of Indian sensibility inaccessible to other Indian languages .A writer's first obligation is to himself, and in whatever language he may write he has to remake it for his own individual needs.

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