

Marxist Idiom in Indian English Poetry

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Abstract: *After the fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of the bureaucratic Stalinist regimes of Russia and Eastern Europe a wave of euphoria provoked in the West. People rejoiced at the demise of Stalinism and termed it as the "end of Socialism." The final victory of the "free market" was trumpeted from the pages of learned journals from Tokyo to New York. The strategists of capital were exultant. Francis Fukuyama even went so far as to proclaim the "end of history." Henceforth, the class war would be no more. Everything would be for the best in the best of all capitalist worlds. History has proved them incredibly wrong. If we take the Post independence Indian English Poetry in account, we will find that Marxist Idiom has played a crucial role in moulding the literature of Indian in a peculiar way. Indian English Literature and especially Indian poetry in English has witnessed multiple social struggles on various levels that motivated a number of poets big and small equally to scribble their pen dipped in the ink of Marxist philosophy of protest. The present paper seeks to explore the unexplored regions of Marxist influence in Indian Poetry in English from its inception to its present day.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Karl Heinrich Marx (b. 5th May 1818, in Trier, Germany) 'is undoubtedly the most influential socialist thinker' who was 'largely unheeded by scholars in his life time'. The body of social and political ideas that he elaborated gained increasingly rapid acceptance in the socialist movement after his death in 1883, and it will be no exaggeration if we say: 'Until recently almost half the population of the world lived under regimes that claimed to be Marxist'. The fundamental belief of the Marxist that 'Economic and Social conditions determine religious beliefs, legal systems and cultural frameworks' and that art should not only represent such conditions truthfully 'but seek to improve them'. Similar is George Lukacs's view that 'realism meant more than rendering the surface appearance, it means providing a more complete, true, vivid and dynamic view around'. This tendency of translating the lived experiences

Post Independence Indian English Poetry into verse form emphasizing the content rather than the form is not entirely new to India. Indian society, a fine mixture of various cultures, traditions and customs has been a fertile land for a Marxist. Though for a Marxist critic, it was more complicated when he turned from the evolution of content to evolution of form. A. Lunacharsky's observation is important to note when he says:

This is an extremely important task, and Plekhanov emphasized its importance. What, then, is the general criterion for evaluation here? The form must correspond to the content as closely as possible, giving it maximum expressiveness and assuring the strongest possible

impact on the readers for whom the work is intended. (15) Besides, he adds: An artist should express something that has not been expressed before. Reproduction is not an art (Some painters find this difficult to understand) but only a craft, albeit sometimes very fine. From this point of view, new content in every new work demands new form. (16) To Marx and Engels art 'is one of the forms of social consciousness and it, therefore, follows that the reason for its changes sought in the social changes. Similarly B. Krylov found a materialist explanation of the origin of aesthetic sense itself in the works of Marx and Engels and he said:

They (Marx and Engels) noted that man's artistic abilities, his capacity for perceiving the world aesthetically, for comprehending its beauty and for creating works of art appeared as a result of the long development of human society and was the product of man's labour. (Marx, et. al. 18)

In his book Economic and Philosophical Manuscript of 1844, Marx pinpoints 'the role of labour in the development of man's capacity to perceive and reproduce the beautiful and to form objects also in accordance with the laws of beauty. (Marx, et. al. 277) And later, the idea evolved by Engels in his book Dialectics of Nature where he noted that the efforts of toil 'have given the human hand the high degree of perfection required conjure into beam, the picture of Raphael, the statues of Thorwaldsen, the picture of Paganine. In this way, we can see that Marxists vision that man's aesthetic sense is not an inborn quality but it is developed in society by and by. Another critic Caudwell supports the fact:

Language is a social product, the instrument whereby men communicate and persuade each other, thus the study of poetry's sources cannot be separated from the study of society. (9)

It is a well-known fact that literature and society cannot be separately studied nor can any literary criticism start discarding the sources or scales of either. Perhaps for this particular reason later on Terry Eagleton laid emphasis on social processes which form the body of literature:

Art then, is for Marxism part of the 'superstructure' of society. It is a part of a society's ideology- an element in that complex structure of social perception which ensures that the situation in which one social class has power over the others is either seen by most members of the society as 'natural' or not seen at all. To understand literature, then, means understanding the total social process of which it is part. (5)

To all leading critics of Marxism, society and literature are corollary to each other. Some critics like James T. Farrell have considered literature as weapon of protest. He said that 'the advocates of proletarian literature, who wrote principally in the New Masses, used to argue that literature is weapon in the class struggle. If the writer is not on one side, he is an open defender of the enemy or else he is giving aid and comfort to that enemy'. According to James Farrell 'life is full of mysteries, and one of the major mysteries of life is man himself. Literature probes into that mystery'. However another statement (his) is also justified when he states:

Literature by its very nature, cannot, in and of itself, solve social and political problems. Any solution to a social or a political problem in a work of literature is a purely mental solution. These are problems of action. Every problem delimits the kind of means which can, and those which cannot be of use in its solution. This statement applies in logic, in mathematics, in the physical sciences, in the solution of social and political problems and in the problems which any artist must face in his own work. It is as absurd to assume that you can solve political and social problems with a poem as it is to call in a painter and ask him to save from death a man stricken with appendicitis by painting a picture. (Farrell) For many Marxists 'it is not enough to eradicate old firmly rooted false notions regarding its historical and social foundation; it is also necessary to draw the literary and aesthetic conclusion from the correct evolution of these social and historical foundation'.

GEORGE LUKACS PROPOSES RIGHTLY

Literature has a great part to play in solving the new task imposed by the new life in every country. If literature is

really to fulfil this role, a role dictated by history, there must be as a natural prerequisite, a philosophical and political rebirth of the writers who produce it. The great lesson to be learnt from the Russian development is precisely the extent to which a great realist literature can fructifyingly educate the people and transform public opinion. But such results can be achieved only by truly great, profound all-embracing realism. Hence, if literature is to be a potent factor of national rebirth, it must itself be reborn in its purely literary, formal, aesthetic aspects as well. It must break with reactionary, conservative traditions which hamper it and resist the seeping in of decadent influences which lead into a blind alley. (Lukacs) The belief that task of literature and art has always been to expose and especially all the dark forces harming the masses must be exposed and all the revolutionary struggle of the masses of the people must be extolled; this is the fundamental task of the revolutionary writer and artist' need a more clear vision which is asserted clearly by Mao-Tse-Tung.

The task of literature and art has always been to expose. This assertion, like the previous one, arises from ignorance of the science of history. Literature and art, as we have shown, have never been devoted solely to exposure. For revolutionary writers and artists the targets for exposure can never be masses, but only the aggressors, exploiters and oppressors and evil influence they have on the people. The masses too have shortcomings which should be overcome by criticism and self-criticism within the people's own ranks, and such criticism and self-criticism is also one of the most important tasks of literature and art. But Mao-Tse-Tung was always against exposure of the people also because counter revolutionary writer and artist describe the people as 'born- food' and the revolutionary masses as 'tyrannical mobs.' Here it is indispensable that a writer or a poet should criticize the people's shortcomings but in doing so he or she should take the stand of the people and speak out of whole hearted eagerness to protect and educate them.

2. MARXISM IN INDIAN POETRY

If one starts journey through the gallery of post-independence Indian English poetry, one observes a considerable influence of Marxism on the Indian Literature and obviously Indian literature in English equally. Kunwar Narain admits this reality and says in an interview:

Marxism in 50's and 60's was a powerful influence on world literature. Its emphasis on grassroots realities, on socio-economic and political educations of human poverty and exploration focused the much needed attention in the problems of common man-that his anguish could be alleviated by effective political, social and economic action

seemed to bring the great utopian dream within reach.(Interview) In the similar tone V.K. Gokak admits Marxism as 'the only Western aesthetic theory that has not yet mixed with oriental aesthetics...' and for this reason Gokak pleads that 'the Marxist believes in the determinism of matter and on that basis seeks to explain all aesthetic phenomena'. Gokak acknowledges Marx as an essential branch of knowledge for understanding social and political phenomenon.

But Gokak does not lay on Marxism a peculiar emphasis for his studies. For him 'Marxism itself suffered some sea changes, two of them being Stalinism and Anti-Stalinism' and in India Gandhism has been an active philosophy of life so he finds that 'it is doubtful whether Marxism has any special reserves of inspiration for the Indian poet.' But at the sometimes he hopes and adds: 'But it can strongly colour the outlook of some poets here and there. (162) Gokak's observation may be true to some extent as his study was limited to the poets between a particular period of 1947-1956, but he is not entirely correct if we glance the entire canvas of post-independence era till present day. As the rapid advancement of science and technology and the revolution in the field of media and communication and transport declined the distances of places to places on one hand, while the distances of between a persons and a person are also diminished on the other. Man can easily experience others' pains and perforations, injustice and exploitation, anomalies and traumas occurring thousands of miles away sitting before his or her computer or television now. So poetic eyes and ears are now more vigilant as well as have more opportunities to protest and contest against the fascist, communal and feudal. Therefore, Bhatnagar's comment is right when he says:

The new Indian poetry in English is not merely novel and varied but also intimately concerned with the milieu around. (Joshi 8) The new poets of Post-independence era are adorned with the feature of realism and protest as they are every day watching the problems of existence: perversion, corruption, degeneration, morbidity, privation, insecurity: terrors of bloodshed; pain and agony of aimless killings and deaths; feelings of helplessness; awareness of political and social turpitude; mockery of idealism; exploitation of poor and independence. In short, the hypocrisy of man is operating at all the levels of society. So, their poetic sensibility naturally turns to protest and wishes not only to reflect these problems of existence into their poetry in a pictorial way but also urges the masses to rise against these doers of injustice and rebel against the so called capitalists, much alike in a manner of the Marxists.

3. LITERARY JOURNEY

The journey of Indian literature commences from the social reformer Raja Ram Mohan Roy who protested firstly against the exploitation of woman and advocated the rights of press in his writings as well as actions and movements. According to M. K. Naik, Roy wrote A Defense of Hindu Theism which was 'the first and original publication in the history'. Later on Henry Derozio (1808-31) who wrote first original poetry in English was less social conscious but more patriotic. Derozio and Kashiprasad set the tone for the love of India which was followed by Toru Dutt, R.N. Tagore, Sarojini Naidu, M.M. Dutt, Sri Aurobindo, Kashiprasad Ghosh, Goroo Chand Dutt and R.C. Dutt. Similarly the first quarter of twentieth century followed Romanticism, Victorianism. Poets like 'Meherji, A.F. Khabardar, N.B. Thadhani, Nizamath Jung, Harendra Nath Chattopadhyaya, and Ananda Acharya exploited Indian and oriental thought in the typical Indian manner'. The second quarter of twentieth century led a rich harvest of poets like 'V.N. Bhushan, S.R. Dongerkery, T.P. Kailasam, N. Krishna Murti and A. Menezes' continued the humanistic trend while Nolini Kant Gupta, Dilip Kumar Roy, E.L. Vaswani, Nirodvaran K.D. Sethna, Nishi Kanto, and Themis carried forward the tradition of mystical poetry. 'The third quarter of 20th century has seen the further strengthening of modernist as well as new symbolist's trend'. Here the poets published from 'Writers Workshop' like, P. Lal, Kamala Das, V.D. Trivedi, Marry Erulkar, A.K. Ramanujan and several others seem to reveal significant development modernist lines in Indo-Anglian poetry'.

The age from 1922 to 1947 can easily be called the age of indianness as all the writings of this period were either glorifying the rich heritage of India or admonishing her decline, but there was no upsurge of protest in the poems of that time as the people of this period were (under Colonialism) struggling for freedom of nation or dazzled by the light of industrial revolution. But few poets cum social reformers protested against the social evils and ills that had taken birth in the medieval age.

4. POST INDEPENDENCE ENGLISH INDIAN POETRY

Indian English poetry before and independence has been a debatable topic among the critics. Critics are bifurcated into two groups on the achievement of Indian English poetry. There is group of critics like C.D. Narasimaih and V.K. Gokak who applaud the poetry of Sri Aurobindo and his Sarojini Naidu, while critics like Parthasarthy and others have appreciated the poetry of post-independence era (after 1947) and have outrightly condemn the poetry of pre independence period. According to these critics there has been no serious

poetry written before independence and this poetry was lacking the voice of protest and common mass and steeped more into 'Romanticism' or Lyricism.' B.K. Das says:

Post independence Indian English poetry is genuine because it is deeply felt and addressed to the whole community; Indian situations form a vital part of it. (4) In fact, these 'Indian Situations' of post-independence period which were full of struggles, sufferings, protest of new India against the age old dogmas and customs and traditions which have already lost their grace, sanction and hold on society in the medieval ages, were responsible for giving birth to 'protest'- a term refreshed by Marx and Engels in Modern ages, and the same term, gained new charms in Indian English poetry after independence.

Though Marxist tendencies or the idea of protest is not entirely new to Indian literature, rather it has its roots in our ancient Vedic literature also. To quote I.K. Sharma is significant:

Protest as an idea is not new to India. Our ancient literature gives umpteen references of a person who opposed, disapproved ungodly, unethical acts of their elders, superiors, mentors and so on. Was 'nt Prahalad, the first greatest protestor? Further, we have Buddha Shakaracharya, Kabir and scores of Vama Margis (leftists) who vehemently opposed the conventional and rigid way of thinking in matters of religious.' (Sharma, I.K.)

Undoubtedly we have sufficient instances of protest which clearly establish the fact that Indian literature has roots in some deeper layer of Marxist soil also, which later on Shaleen Kumar Singh, Ph.D., C S J M University Kanpur, India bloomed and nurtured new roses of 'Protest' in Post- independence climate. The first flower of protest blossoms after independence during 'Emergency' (1975). Prof. John Oliver Perry, a devout scholar and critic of Indian English poetry, edited Voices of Emergency -an all India Anthology of Protest Poetry of 1975-77 in which the poems 'touch on universal themes which have been evoked by similar injustice an incarceration the world over'. The poems of the anthology, according to David Selbourne mirror 'the poet's fear of his own cowardice, or of the impotence of the poem; a sense of the world, and the word, befouled; the poet's cautious and sidelong glance at the tyrant, the identities of both camouflaged by metaphor, the sardonic smile of the unbowed- a untouched- mocking the pretensions of power; and plain defiance, as old as tyranny itself, but much more enduring'. (Perry: "Foreword" IX)

However, the book contained some 280 poems from eight languages and two hundred and fifty poets from

various parts of India whose voices of protest were not muffled and were taking the shapes of written words. The book depicts the trauma of oppressions, incarceration and detention during the periods of 1975-77 which was also no less deeply vocalized by poets of Indian English. The voice of protest in a higher crescendo can be listened in the words of Dilip Chitre who opens his poem with a question in a conversational style as follows. And he seems more shattered when he says: A patriot beyond question? For all that, you might still prefer to be a traitor among stupid people trying hard not to die. (VE 135) In the same anthology, the voice of Kamala Das is also stronger than any other poet of protest who says: Tomorrow they may bind me with chains stronger than those of my cowardice, rape me with bayonets and Hang me for my doubts. (VE 230)

Another poet, Amrit Gangar rises rapidly and says vehemently in the words of Rajan who was imprisoned in Kerala in 1975 and died apparently from police abuse. The poet asks:

The anthology contains best poems of emergency. These poems castigate the political scenario with equal proportion to the social system. Besides 'the poetry of emergency period of political turmoil in India presents spectacle of self-discovery on the part of Indian poets as well as plays a dominant role in shaping the present form of Indian English poetry'. K. Ayyappa Paniker seems aright in this context:

Thus the poetics of the emergency may be seen to have a greater validity than its politics, for now we know neither the politicians nor those who support them learned any lesson from the experiences of the emergency. The only gain of the emergency-if anything at all of value has lasted is perhaps this new poetics which has begun to mould the features of the poetry of the post-emergency period. (Perry "Introduction" 3). Although, the anthology contains poems of other Indian languages, the poems written originally in English by Jayant Mahapatra, Nissim Ezekiel, Neeraj Sinha, Melani Silgado, I.K. Sharma, G.V.J. Prasad, Nag Bhushan Patnayak, Navroz Modi, Keshav malik, H.S. Lal, Ivon Kostaka, Satyapal Julka and G.K.G. Joshi carry the theme of protest with equal gravity and poetic sensibility. After emergency, Indian the poetics of Indian English poets is entirely changed their voice, their emotions and feelings in a more enhanced, intense, precise, symbolic and effective manner. The novelty of expression, realistic imagery, symbolism lament of the loss of age old sacraments, values, cultural and moral decline, reasonless attitude and hollowness of advancement of science and technology have been the chief traits of post- independence Indian English poets. Both established and well-published poets and less known poets have scribbled their pen in the ink of

protest, yet a few contemporary poets deserve a special mention like A.N. Dwivedi, Jayant Mahapatra, Nar Deo Sharma, O.P. Bhatnagar, D.H. Kabadi, Dilip Chitre, R.C. Shukla, Arun Kolatkar, Pritish Nandy, Bibhu Padhi, Niranjana Mohanty, R.K. Singh, Keki N. Daruwala, and Baldev Mirza who protest and social conscious poets first than anyone else. A.N. Dwivedi, a major protest poet has a peculiar collection of title Protest Poems in which 37 poems, both new and old deal with the theme of protest in a vivid and varied manner. Dwivedi is a poet with a clear social and political vision so he says in an interview with Dr. Nilanshu K. Agarwal:

A poet should air out the pains and sufferings of the people as best as he can. Their conditions must be ameliorated. The political system has not been able to deliver goods to the deprived and the destitute. The need of the hour is to evolve a social system, on the pattern of the British welfare society, in which they can live honourably and work profitably. The affluent and resourceful can do a lot in establishing such a system. The poet on his part can go on highlighting their sorrow and problem in an effective manner. This is what I have been doing in my poetry. ("An Epistolary Interview") The poems of A.N. Dwivedi are the mirror of modern life hagridden with corruption, bribery, falsity, communalism, castism, political and social imbalance and other foibles of human being. His voice rises in question when he looks at the demon of communal riots:

Besides, Dwivedi has a deep understanding of present changed political system of post-independence era which has a close relation with the Gunda and gangsters who are both the leaders and leader-makers at present. His observation of politician and Gunda nexus is realistic: This nexus is nebulous, But works miracles Thru hints'n' gestures One emerges victorious Hilarious over his success; The other grows rich For his power to clitch The other contestants. (PP 63) An equally social conscious poet O.P. Bhatnagar has also observed the social canvas of life of Indians who after half a century of independence have been mentally slave: We've broken the chains of slavery

My father left in the snow. (Mirza 17) His collection Buddha my Love, is the poetic mural of human sufferings cries, longings and a potent voice of protest against the enemies of nation. Mirza holds man responsible for the tragedies and he writes: I am Karna But I have murdered none my only crime is that I refused to Put the wheel Meant to crush the poor the oppressed. (Buddha My Love 17) Similarly, D. H. Kabadi, a refreshing voice of Post-Independence Indian English Poetry whose collection Pyramid Poems has a number of social conscious poems, reveal him as a poet with a mission not to arouse feelings merely but to develop a vision and

motivate him to stand against the oppressions. His realistic satires and ironies purge our feelings as well as emotions when he says:

Our System

They say is an

Ass you can buy it

With hard cash and trash. (Kabadi 1)

Besides, women poets like Kamala Dass, Gauri Deshpandya, Lila Dharmraj, Malti Rao, Monika Verma, Anna Sujata Modayil, Laxmi Kannan, Rita Malhotra and Margret Chatterjee protested not only against men and their oppressions but widened their horizons and wrote considerably on the exploitations done by the other people of power and pelf. Gauri Deshpande's 'Rain Poem' provides a realistic image of rains and floods of Kerala and the measures taken by the Government in this regard:

It is quite in the city as we collect Ridiculous defense of boots and macs. There's still time for chawls to collapse, For buses to skid and kill, Trains to snarl and flus to catch. Ritually we rejoice before we pay Flood- relief funds every year. (Dasgupta 45)

The voices of protest have expanded its horizon by cutting across the linguistic barriers and various movements like Dalit movement in Maharashtra and Gujrat, Bhooki Peedi Andolan in Bengal and Bandaya movement in Karnataka articulated a silent pain of 'a section of our people relegated to the bottom of the social hierarchy for more than thirty centuries' and laid the foundation stone of protest in their native languages. Namdeo Dhasal and Bhujang Meshram pioneered Dalit movements of poetry in Maharashtra, Malay Roy Chaudhry led Hungrialist Movement in Bengali language (launched by what is known as the Hungryalist quartet i.e. Shakti Chattopadhyay, Malay Roy Choudhury, Samir Roy Choudhury and Debi Roy), Siddhilinghaiah led Dalit – Bandaya movement in Kannada Literature and Pash, a Punjabi progressive poet took lead in protest poetry in Punjabi Literature. These poets even paid heavy price for writing poetry of protest. But these poets consequently succeeded in delivering their message and sowing the seeds of protest in their reader's heart.

In recent years, the voice of protest is growing louder after the carnage in communal riots on the demolition of Babri Masjid, and the brutal massacres in Gujrat in 2003 and the merciless killings in Kashmir and other parts of the nation in various terrorist attacks. One Hundred Poems for Peace is a significant anthology of poems written by

teenagers expressing despair and anger, fear and sorrow, hope and compassion and even protest. One cannot but marvel at such expression fumed with protest.

The hopes and dreams of Karl Marx and Ram Mohan Roy have been materialized in the present context because English has gripped tightly the foundation of India and has become potent medium of expression as well as flourished, nourished and advanced with Indian society and culture and lastly succeeded in vocalizing the pains, pleasures and protest of Indian mind and heart in verse-form.

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