Literature and Society are the two sides of the same coin. Reflection of the contemporary society is very much noticed in various forms of literature. Poetry, being a very important form of literature, has been undergoing a mutation. How can Indian English Poetry an exception to it? Gordon Bottomley typically described Indian English poetry as “Matthew Arnold in Sari.” But in 21st Century Indian English poetry is fully grown up. Bottomley’s criticism turned into eulogy as Indian English poetry carrying a special kind of sensibility. It becomes the incorporation of universal values. Like any other literature it becomes a chronicle of the personal, the social and the racial. It becomes very peculiar, both universal and Indian at the same time.

Early Indian English Poetry:
Indian poetry in English began in 1827 with the publication of the first Indo-Anglican poet Derozio’s (1809-31) poems. This initiated emergence of poetic creation in English by Indians, Toru Dutt, Sarojini Naidu and Sri Aurobindo are our most well-known poets in the Pre-Independence era. But they are said to have imitated the English poets. Perhaps because of Bottomley criticism of them, Indian English poetry reflects Indian conscience labelling it as Indian Poetry (writing) in English.

The earlier poets of the 19th century to the Independence of India made an attempt to explain India to the rest of the world. The poems were written for the western readers. Henry Derozio, Sarojini Naidu and Sri Aurobindo had done the task of tampering India to the western world.

The advent of the dawn of Independence changed the whole poetic scenario. Nissim Ezekiel became the first modern Indian English poet in the Post-Independence period. His first collection of poetry, ‘A Time to Change’ (1952) can be said to herald modernism in Indian English poetry. Indian English poetry emerged as a distinct genre in the works of Nissim

**Indian English Poetry in the 21st Century:**
The emergence of post-modern Indian English poetry includes urbanization, social change, mobility, independence, invent of Information Technology, etc. In this era Indian English Poetry became more Indianized in nature. The poets living in the 21st century are different from the earlier poets. They are alienated by their English language education. They hail from such communities as Parsis, Jews, Christians or being rebel from Hinduism and Islam or by living abroad. Many of the poets came from the westernized families. Like their early counterparts their heightened awareness of Indian experience is noticeable. The narrative which is generally used in the poem has become an experience itself instead of an example in argument. The contemporary representative Indian English poets are Sunita Jain (1940), Sujata Bhatt (1956), Rukmini Bhaya Nair (1952), Makarand Paranjape (1960), R. K. Singh, K. D. Singh, Suniti Namjoshi and so on.

Jayant Mahapatra, a leading Indian English poet expresses his dissatisfaction with the quality of 21st century poetry. He evaluated the era as the era of short poems on contemporary subjects. He also gave credit to the Indian English poets for using English creatively in Indian situations and creating an Indian English Idioms. The authenticity of Indian English poetry in 21st century is beyond question. It has successfully assimilated the Indian sensibility into its texture by employing various themes of contemporary interest. The Indian English poetry in 21st century becomes ‘glocal’. It is marked by quest for identity, a search for routes, changing socio-cultural and ethico-moral values. Some of the much-celebrated poets belong to the tribe of diaspora and show a sense of alienation, double home situation, uprootedness and impact of non-Indian culture and mannerism.

It will not be inappropriate as impertinent to categories these poets in 21st century in two groups- the poets having Diasporic and expatriate as ‘emigre’ sensibility and the poets having native, local and rooted sensibility. Writers of the Indian diaspora have been fairly centrestaged recently because of the theoretical formulations and growing interest in cultural studies. Any language and culture change as they come in contact with other languages and cultures. Diasporic writing raises questions regarding the definitions of ‘home’ and ‘nation’.
schizophrenia and/or nostalgia. These are the major preoccupations of these Indo-Anglian poets. They often seek to locate themselves in new cultures. Some important names of the diasporic poets include Uma Parameshwaran, Surjit Kalsay, Laxmi Gill, Himani Bunnerjee, Suniti Namjoshi and so on.

The Important 21st century Indian English poets:

The important poets can be categorized into two group:
1) The Indian poets having diasporic, expatriate and emigre sensibility.
2) The Indian poets having native or rooted sensibility.

The works of the important poets writing Indian English poetry in 21st century bring out the truth of the remarks made above. Therefore let’s consider these poets and their important works.

Sunita Jain (1940) is a bilingual authoress. She is primarily a love-poet. Her "Sensum: Collected Poems" is very popular.

A widely travelled poet, Sujata Bhatt (1956) writes 'My Mother’s Way of Wearing a Sari' (2000). She is widely travelled. She reflects her both the experiences inside the country and that of abroad in her poetry.

Rukmini Bhaya Nair (1952) has two collections of poems the ‘Hyoid Bone’ (1992) and the ‘Ayodha Cantos: Poems’ (1999) to her credit. The contemporary political condition is shown against the backdrop of Babri Masjid demolition in December 1992 in her poetry. Her other wonderful poems, 'Seasons', 'Kali', 'The Third Eye' and 'Buddha' were published in Journal of literature and Aesthetics [July-Dec-2001, 116-17]

Makarand Paranjape (1960) is a promising poet. He is essentially a poet of love. His two interesting poems are- “The Homecoming” and “Torsos”. In “The Homecoming” the protagonist comes back to India only to die a peaceful death.

The Posthumous Poems of C.P. Surendran (1959) grew out of the failure of Naxalite Movement and Communism which deeply touched the heart of the poet. This man made calamities of 21st century are highlighted in his poems.
R.K. Singh (1950) has published widely in the post-1980 period. He writes poems about contemporary life. His long poem 'Prayer to Lord Jagannath' is a memorable poem. His 'Above the Earth's Green' (1997) and 'Cover to Cover' (2002) are good collections of poetry which contribute substantially to the post-1980 Indian English Poetic Movement. Like most of the contemporaries, R. K. Singh writes topical poems. The current state of affairs hurt him. Hence, he writes -

“It hurts to see my country die
Slowly and steadily after
50 years of self rule

The ruler are blind
To common man asking
A fair share and honest rule”

During this period, we do not get other many long poems in English. On the other hand, we get many short poems on contemporary subjects. There is emergence of minimalist poetry.


Suniti Namjoshi’s ‘The Beast Came Up to Me’ expresses frantic deviations in the face of imperious assaults. She brings out the expatriate sensibility. Her Poetry reflects mock self-assertion in lesbianism and feminist moorings. The poets with Diasporic sensibility are Kaushalya Bannerjee, “Insumnia”, Nilambari Singh “To Two Moral Selves” and Surjit Kalsey “Siddhartha Does Penance Once Again”.

The poetry of 21st Century Indian English seemed to be quite mature and practical. It reflects contemporary values and morality also. It also successfully assimilated the Indian sensibility into its texture by employing various themes of contemporary interest. It has chosen the native Indian English as the medium of expression. Hence, it is different from Australian /African / Canadian / Caribbean poetry. The authenticity of contemporary Indian English Poetry is beyond question. The ‘Locale’ of this poetry is not only India but the Globe also. Hence, it becomes ‘glocal’ in the true sense of the term.
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