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NPTEL ONLINE CERTIFICATION COURSE

Indian Poetry in English

Lecture 01: Introduction to Indian Poetry in English Part I

BINOD MISHRA

DEPARTMENT OF HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES



Why Poetry?

If not asked, I know;
If you ask me, I know not.
(St. Augustine)



"The true poetic word thus strives to catch the inward eye, to reach the inward ear, and to sink into the deeper profundities of the awakening or awakened soul. The real aim of the arts - architecture, sculpture, painting, music, poetry - is to speak to the spirit of man through meaningful images and only the media vary in their different arts, the poet's being the word that is charged with power and purpose. Most people are content to live in the outer mind and senses, but the aim of art and especially poetry is to help us to live in the soul, to enable us to see into the utter truth of things. And the poet has to find the words and the rhythm that would achieve this aim." (Iyengar, Vol. 2, 1109)

Poetry Vs. Science

- Both deal with the same phenomena but have different approaches.
- Suggestive and subjective-objective/ Technical and objective
- New Critics
- **I. A. Richards-** Emotive language and Scientific language
- Meaning: **Sense, Feeling, Tone and Intention**



A botanical object or a poetic object?

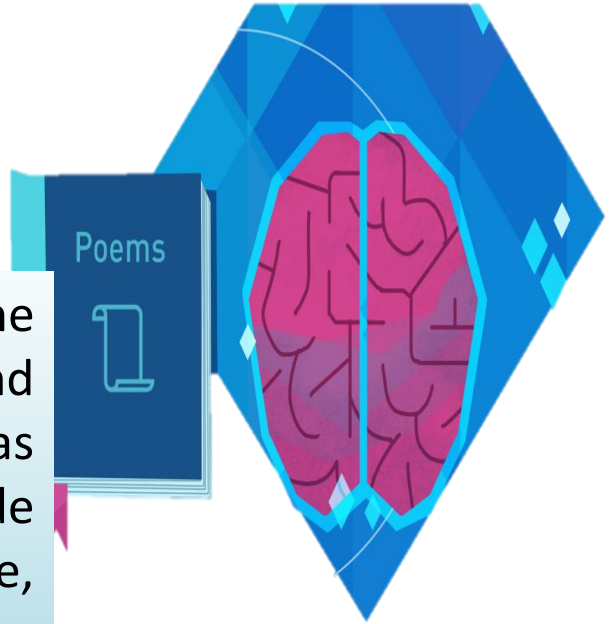
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- Poetry begins where matter of fact or of science ceases to be merely such, and to exhibit a further truth, the connection it has with the world of emotion , and its power to produce imaginative pleasure. (Leigh Hunt)

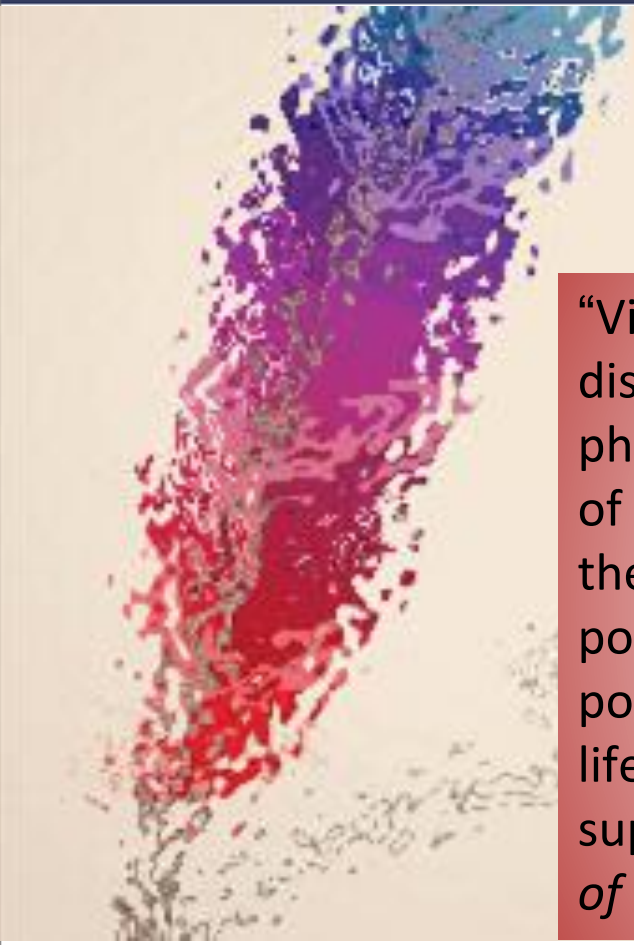
- The poet will always and of necessity deal largely with such aspects of things as appeal *directly to the senses and the feelings*, there is nothing to prevent him from penetrating beneath their surface, or from taking as his subject matter those more recondite truths of nature which are revealed by science.

Function of Poetry

Art for Art's sake Vs. Art for Life's sake



Wallace Stevens said that poetry was one of the enlargements of life. Oscar Wilde, marvellous critic and dramatist though a weak poet, remarked that all art was perfectly useless, an irony we need not literalize. Wilde knew, better than almost all of us, that Shakespeare, Michelangelo, and Mozart are superbly useful: they give the more difficult pleasures that can persuade us to abandon pleasures that are too easy, to adopt Shelley's formulation of the Sublime mode. - Bloom



Power of a Poet

"Vision is the characteristic power of the poet, as is discriminative thought the essential gift of the philosopher and analytic observation the natural genius of the scientist. The Kavi was in the idea of the ancients the seer and reveller of truth…Therefore the greatest poets have been always those who have had a large and powerful interpretative and intuitive vision of Nature and life and man and whose poetry has arisen out of that in a supreme revelatory utterance of it."- Aurobindo, *Future of Poetry.*

The Ancient Roots of Our Literature

"The Vedic poets regarded their poetry as Mantras, they were vehicles of their own realisations and could become vehicles of realisation for others."- Aurobindo

Tamil literature is the oldest



'The universe itself is considered the poem of God.'

Contd...

- Vasco da Gama (1498)
- Portuguese and Dutch
- The East India Company
- Administrative vacuum
  (created by disintegration
  of Mughal empire)



https://www.alamy.com/stock-photo-navigation-route-of-vasco-da-gama-to-india-78948526.html

What Indian English literature meant?

- Gave voice to the voiceless in their struggle for social justice.
- Worked as an elixir to the wounds caused by social chaos.
- Allowed ‘culture’ to flower in the native soil.
- Allowed women to claim their voice.
- Help discover identity and stability.
- Offered a sense of belongingness.



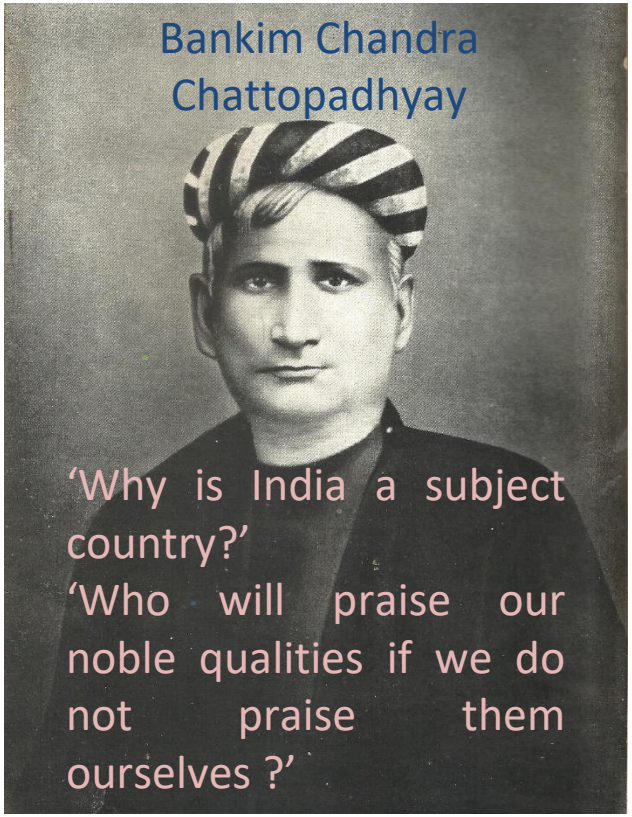
Image Credit: Wikimedia Commons

Repercussions

Colonial poets to follow some unsaid rules.

What was remembered of our past?

- Towards discovering its past and its identity.
- Birth of Nationalism
- Collision between Indian religion and colonial Indian education.
- Awareness of indigenous tradition and culture.
  e. g. **Michael Madhusudan Dutt** made a shift from English to Bengali



History of Indian English Literature

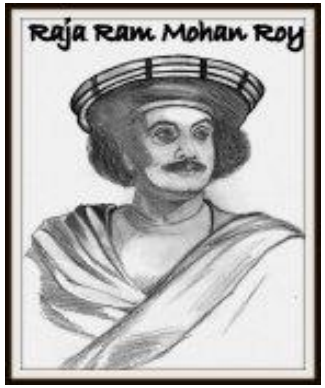
- There are divergent views about its definition.
- Indo-Anglian Literature , Indian Writing in English, Indo-English Literature
- V.K. Gokak's book *English in India: Its Present and Future*, (1964) makes explicit differences between the terms Indo-Anglian literature and Indo-English literature.
- J.B. Alphonso Karkala in his book *Indo-English Literature in the 19th Century* (1970) suggests the term to mean literature produced by Indians in English.

Introduction to Indian English Writing

- By-product of an eventful encounter between enterprising Britain and stagnant India (Naik). Relation between a country and language.
- Identified with many various appellations

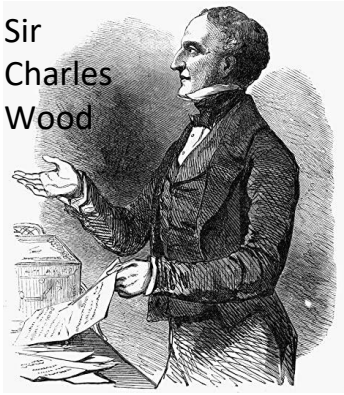
  ('Indo-Anglican Literature', 'Indian Writing in English', 'Indo-English Literature'…).
- Bengal is the first home of Indian English literature, where it flourished before it did in Bombay.

English Education in India

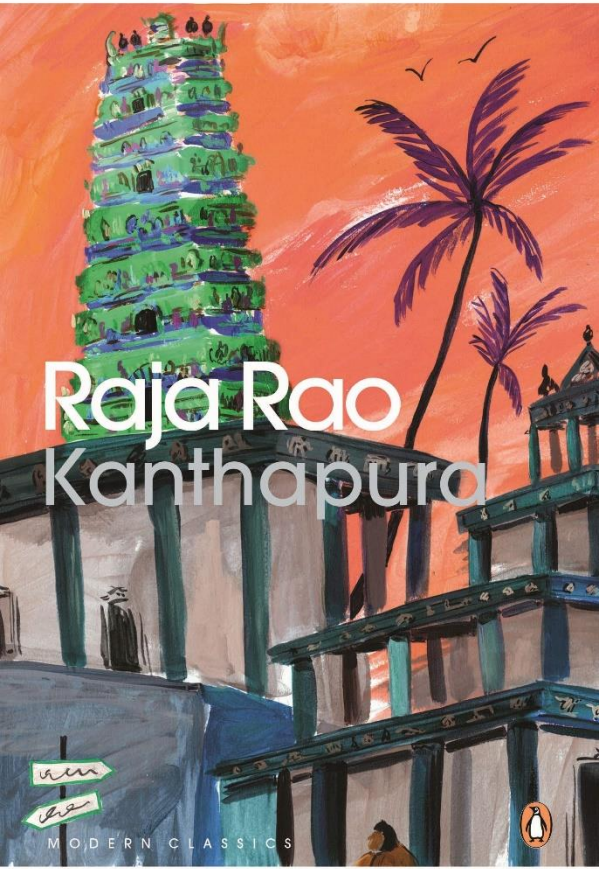




Sir Charles Wood



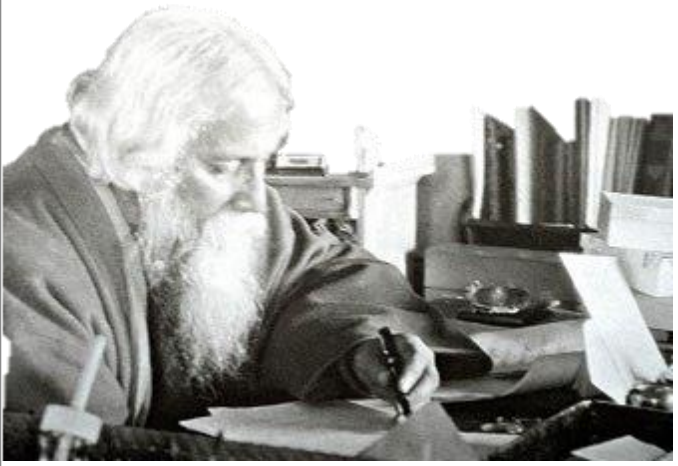
- “Letter on English Education” by Raja Ram Mohan Roy.
- Macaulay’s “Minute on Education”.
- Charles Wood’s contributions towards promoting education in India.



English, as Language in India

"The telling has not been easy. *One has to convey in a language that is not one's own the spirit that is one's own.* One has to convey the various shades and omissions of a certain thought- movement that looks maltreated in an alien language. I use the word 'alien', yet English is not really an alien language to us. It is the language of our intellectual make-up- like Sanskrit or Persian was before---but not our emotional makeup. We are all 'instinctively' bilingual"

(Rao, 'Preface' to *Kanthapura*, 1938; emphasis mine)



Indians Writing in English

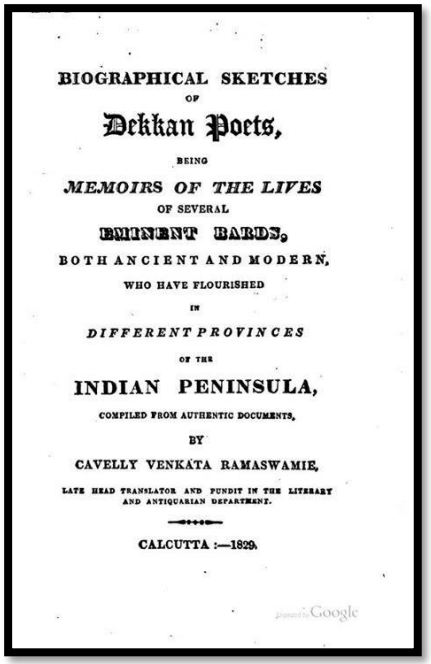
You have written to me about my English translations of Gitanjali. How I wrote them and why people liked them so much I still cannot quite comprehend. That I cannot write English is such a plain fact that I never had the pride to ever feel ashamed of it. If anybody wrote to me in English inviting me to tea, I didn't have the courage to even write a reply. You're thinking perhaps that I have rid myself of that illusion today- absolutely to the contrary- that I have written in English seems to me to be the illusion.- Tagore (Letter to his niece written on May 6, 1913)

Gradual Change in Mentality

I speak three languages, write in
Two, dream in one.
Don't write in English, they said, English is
Not your mother-tongue. Why not leave
Me alone, critics, friends, visiting cousins,
Every one of you? Why not let me speak in
Any language I like? *The language I speak,*
Becomes mine, its distortions, its queernesses
All mine, mine alone.
It is half English, half Indian, funny perhaps, but it is honest,
It is as human as I am human

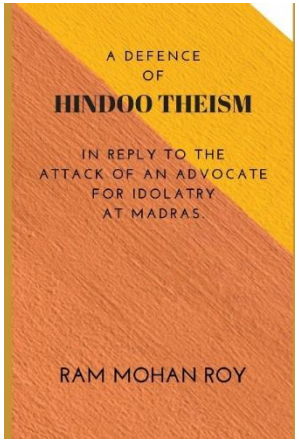
("An Introduction", Kamala Das, 1965: emphasis mine)

Indian English Literature



BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCHES
OF
Dekkan Poets,
BEING
MEMOIRS OF THE LIVES
OF SEVERAL
EMINENT BARDS,
BOTH ANCIENT AND MODERN,
WHO HAVE FLOURISHED
IN
DIFFERENT PROVINCES
OF THE
INDIAN PENINSULA,
COMPILED FROM AUTHENTIC DOCUMENTS,
BY
CAVELLY VENKATA RAMASWAMIE,
LATE HEAD TRANSLATOR AND PUNDIT IN THE LITERARY AND ANTIQUARIAN DEPARTMENT.
CALCUTTA :—1829.

- Indian English writing started before the various conflicts arising in the education system.
- Autobiographies (first exercise in Indian English literature)
- Low status of regional language in comparison to English.



'Inaugurator of modern age in India'- Tagore

Early Poetry in English by an Indian

Cavilla Venkata Ramaswami's English rendering of *Viswagunadarsana* of Avasanipala Venkatadhvarin , an early 17th century Sanskrit poem, is supposedly the earliest verse in English by an Indian, though being a translation.

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“A poet is, before anything else, a person who is passionately in love with language.”

(W.H. Auden)

Thank You