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The Contribution of Chennai Poets' Circle to English Poetry in India

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Abstract: In general, this paper analyses the growth of English poetry in India as a result of the contribution of important Indian poets, writing in English especially those coming from the southern part of India, specifically the members of the twenty year old Chennai Poets circle, a niche group of poets. The paper analyses the contributions of two poets, Dr. Nithie Victor and Dr. M. Thirumeni, key members of the Chennai Poets circle and their impact on English poetry in India. The Chennai Poetry Circle has been found to be one of the important movements assisting in the Revival of English poetry in India.

Keywords: Chennai Poets Circle {CPC}, English Poetry in India

Introduction:

The History of English Poetry in India is long and enviously beautiful. It formally started with the works of Henry Vivian Derozio, who was half-Portuguese. A large number of Indian poets have contributed to the larger cause of English poetry. The contributions of Rabindranath Tagore, P. Lal, Michael Madhusudhan Dutt and ManMohan Ghosh have been widely discussed. The poems of Jayanta Mahapatra, Arun Kolatkar, Nissim Ezekiel, Shiv. K. Kumar, A.K. Ramanujan, Vikram Seth, Keki. N. Daruwallah and Kamala Das have been widely discussed. The poets from the southern part of India have contributed richly to English poetry in India. However their contributions have not been properly discussed and remain, largely forgotten. It is in this context that a specialised study of the contribution of the Chennai Poets Circle to English Poetry in India has been undertaken. The Chennai Poets Circle is a part of the larger movement of Indian poets writing in English seeking to be a part of a global English poetry consciousness. This group was greatly inspired by the Grand Old Man of English poetry in India, Dr. Krishna Srinivas. It was Dr. Krishna's constant prodding that brought out the hidden poets in many persons. A person of great warmth, kindness and sagacity, Padma Bhushan Dr. Krishna Srinivas was the editor of the international poetry journal 'Poet' and also a Founder President of the World Poetry Society. He was instrumental in bringing the World Congress of

Poets to Chennai on the first day of September, 2007. All poets writing in English in India are indebted to him.

The origin of CPC dates back to a day in 1997 when three poets assembled in a doctor's house in Kilpauk in Chennai and read their poems in candle light due to power failure. The three poets were Dr. M.Thirumeni, Dr. S. Radhamani and Mr. Yogesh Nair. At that time, the group was called Poetry Foundation India chapter. Later on conferences began to be held in the auditorium of the World University Service Centre, Egmore in Chennai. In 2003, it was christened as Chennai Poets' Circle and an emblem of 'Light House' was adopted. There are monthly meets of CPC, where poetry readings and scholarly discussions are conducted. There are more than a 100 permanent members of the CPC. In addition, every year, a book of poems titled, 'Efflorescence' is released and an Annual National seminar is conducted, wherein eminent poets from all over the country read their poems. In addition, scholarly papers are presented on variegated topics pertaining to English Literature, specifically poetry.

Waves of Indian poets writing in English have contributed to the growth of English poetry in India. The Indian poets writing in English have certain distinctive features such as extolling the glory of the Indian land, people and diverse culture and thus richly contributing to the existing repository of thoughts and feelings in English poetry.

Another distinctive feature is that words from Indian languages are widely found in the poetry of Indian poets writing in English. The English language gets richer because of the adoption of various words from different Indian languages. Thirdly, the voices of an ancient civilization get an audience. Ancient teachings get reflected in the poetry of Indian poets writing in English. There is warmth and love in the Indian poems, which is the need of the hour. Fourthly, India has the world's second largest number of English speakers. There is no question of looking away and not caring for English poetry from India. In fact, all English literature emanating from India needs to be examined closely.

Review of literature:

In spite of a vast body of English literature especially, English poetry in India, there are only some significant works regarding English poetry in India. This includes 'Indo-Anglian Literature' (1943) and 'Indian writing in English' (1962) by K.R.S Iyengar, 'The Golden Treasury of Indo-Anglian Poetry' (1970) edited by Vinayak Krishna Gokak and published by Sahitya Akademi, 'Indian Response to Poetry in English' (1970) by M. K. Naik, 'Modern Indian Poetry in English: An Anthology And A Credo' (1963) by P.Lal, 'An Anthology of New Indian English Poetry' (1993) by Makarand Paranjape. Others include 'Brave New World: Indian English Poets' (2009) by Dr. K.V. Raghupathi, 'Discourses on Contemporary Indian English Poets' (2010) by K.V. Dominic, 'English Poetry in India: A Comprehensive Survey of Trends and Thought Patterns' (2011) by P.C.K. Prem, 'Indian English Poetry: Searching New Ground' (2013) by S.L Peeran, Recent Indian English Poetry(2014) by V.V.B Rama Rao, 'Indian English Poetry: Time and Continuity'(2016) by P.C.K. Prem and 'Critical Survey of Indo-English Poetry' authored by Dr. T.V Reddy and some others. These were useful references for study but there is hardly any work, which has covered the nascent area of the contribution of Chennai Poets Circle to English Poetry in India. This is indeed the gap, where research is required. This study is completely new with no parallels.

Objectives of the Study:

To understand the contribution of poets belonging to Chennai Poets Circle to English Poetry in India. The contributions of two eminent poets of CPC have been selected for this purpose.

Methodology:

The poems of two poets, Mr. Nithie Victor and Dr. M. Thirumeni of CPC have been analysed in detail.

A. Dr. M. Thirumeni:

Dr. M. Thirumeni is a renowned educationist and writer. A few poems from the vast repertoire of poems of Dr. Thirumeni have been chosen. Mr. Thirumeni is noted for his landscape and travel poems.

1. Feminism in India or Across the Gangetic Plains:

‘From the AC coach of Farakka Expresss,

That moves from Benaras to Delhi,

I am able to see through window panes,

The village folk toiling in the fields.’

(Poetry World Anthology 162-163)

The above lines are full of lyrical beauty. In this poem, the poet recollects his childhood memories. The poem is rich in visual and tactile imagery. The poet expresses his love for his native land, India with the love for his family members, specifically his sisters. There is the beautiful message that feminism or ‘women’s emancipation’ is not just a word but it has actually been put in practice in India.

‘No one questioned when my sisters ploughed the lands;

Drew water from the well for sugarcane;

And drove the cart filled with paddy, home

Who says there is no feminism in India?’

(Poetry World Anthology 162-163)

Details like ‘A/C coach’, makes the poem more vivid and believable. The poem is full of human sympathy. The poet’s personality is revealed in this lyrical poem.

The poem has a spiritual message as well.

2. Key Chains:

This is a travel poem. It is a key poem that must be read, again and again. It is full of sensitive humanitarian messages. It deals with the important topic of economic and political subjugation of the Africans by the White imperialists. The poet has made use of the platform of poetry to convey his deep disillusionment with the existing inequities in the world.

3. **Earth's Gifts:** This poem is a very earthy poem. The poet has intelligently placed certain technical words like 'Kleptomania' to bring a great deal of authenticity into the poem.

'AP farmers in the abundance of yield,

Neither punish me nor reprove of my kleptomania.'

'Why should I go to West or North,

To enjoy the unplucked apples of bitter taste?'

The poem contains the beautiful message that it is the human mind that plays tricks upon the human soul and that things are often not what they seem to be.

4. **Calcutta, O Calcutta:**

This is a prominent poem by Dr. M. Thirumeni. Phrases like 'men of genius followed like fountain water' are highly beautiful. This poem was highly appreciated by Ruth Wildes Schuler. Dr. M. Thirumeni has at once praised and condemned 'The City of Joy'. The poet feels disheartened when he goes to Victoria Hall, 'where the statues of English Lords and generals stand and where the paintings of colonial past hang.' He praises the great people, the city has produced and at the same time, his concluding line of the poem is, 'You are the symbol of Indian Fall,' which reveals the sense of disillusionment in the poet, when he speaks of the city. This poem is a lyric.

5. **On the Slopes of Alps:**

In this poem, the poet's love for nature is revealed. He is able to love with equanimity, his native India and the lands, which remind him of his Homeland.

6. **Towards Farms:** This is yet another beautiful nature poem. The lines convey the poet's love for nature

'I must run to the moor where the palms grow and dogs bark,

And roll on the soft grass and dried leaves,

All I love is a shepherd's flute and sheep's bleat,

There in nature in my endless treat."

Thus, Dr. Thirumeni's poems are Tennysonian and Keatsian, celebrating life and nature. They are rich in imagery and resonate with compassion.

B. Dr. Nithie Victor: He was an eminent poet of CPC and editor of the journal, 'Efflorescence'. His poems are noted for his diction and rhyme.

1. 'The Spring Arrives'

Lines like,

'Sleepy winter turned senile, his icy

Stranglehold on earth's pulse slowly loosens.' have certain features:

i. There is a rich visual imagery involved. Our imagination creates the winter and its old age. We can imagine a tired, weak and old winter.

ii. The use of poetry techniques like 'alliteration'

sleepy....senile...stranglehold...slowly makes this poem, very beautiful.

iii. Winter is personified. 'Winter' is a metaphor and takes a human form.

Winter wants to dominate and prevent the growth of new ideas and old people.

iv. Lines like, 'Vibrant life, he tried in vain to suffocate,

Gently stirs, struggling off the shards of sleet' are lines filled with the wondrous poetical instrument called 'allusion'.

v. There is beautiful imagery in the lines, 'Cups of dells with xanthian showers of young sun brim, Distant fells in golden sheen relief'. The lines are rhyming and rhythmic. The poem is rhythmic and rich in imagery; these are elements of true poetry.

vi. Deviant syntax has been used well in this poem. Example: 'peck the silence'.

2. A Divine Gift:

The poet has written this poem in first person. The poem is either about the poet's own experiences in being with a good better-half or it may be about what he really wants from a better spouse. The poem is replete with exquisite visual and tactile imagery.

Examples:

i. 'Her hands strike not classic pose of danseuse, But deftly conjures up a gourmet's fare.' One can imagine a classical danseuse' posture and also a gourmet's fare!

ii. 'Hers not the sensuous lips of Aphrodite, But never part with prickly words to wound.'
Wonderful imagery again!

3. The Cane Juice Vendor:

The poem is extremely poignant and compelling to read because it has a vital message that what may be good for one may not be good for the other. The rains, which are so vital for the welfare of people does not bring happiness to the cane juice vendor! The poem is full of irony! The imagery is gripping.

Prosody techniques like non-selectional restriction have been used in an exemplary manner!

Example: 'And douse the burning hunger of his wife and kids'.

4. Dilemma of the Nameless:

This poem must be read again and again. The poem begins with the line, 'A publisher of literature, famed.' Nithie Victor has expressed his ire against fraudulent practices in the writing business. He was not afraid to speak the truth. He has taken on the coterie of those publishers, writers and critics, who allow a select few to seize the echelons of writing success without giving a fair chance to meritorious writers.

Lines like, 'With thriving business and soaring sales, Blew his trumpet loud and shrill on the stage', 'A widely published and publicised poet', 'Followed a critic of dim perception', 'He was seated amidst the nameless crowd' (Poetry World 207-208) are both rhythmic and evocative. The very human feeling of helplessness and hopelessness is splendidly portrayed. The poem is evocative of human agony and frustration. All four groups of people in the writing field have been covered, i.e., the publishers, the successful writers, the critics and those of meritorious talent, who have not got their due.

Dr. Nithie Victor's style is Wordsworthian. His poems have the dreamy quality of Coleridge and Shelley.

Other notable CPC Members:

There are a number of other people, who have contributed to the cause of CPC in different ways. One of the earlier meetings of the Chennai Poets Circle took place in the home of the eminent jurist, Dr. S.L. Peeran, also a distinguished poet with several collections of poetry to his credit. A deep believer in Sufism, Dr. S.L. Peersan's secular traditions is unparalleled. Poems like 'Total Surrender', 'Damned Man', 'Reach Moksha' and 'To a Lost Son' are memorable poems, which have emerged from the pen of S.L. Peeran.

Another important personality associated with CPC is Dr. Syed Ameeruddin. Prof. Syed Ameeruddin in association with Dr. Krishna Srinivas was instrumental in convening the historic All India Poets Meet in 1975. He has attended several World Congress of Poets. Shri P.C.K. Prem, senior bureaucrat turned poet and writer has praised highly the poems of Dr. Syed Ameeruddin. Prof. Syed Ameeruddin is a pre-eminent poet of Chennai with several collections of poetry to his credit. His patriotic poems are unparalleled in their sagacity and creativity. Lines like, 'What is this? New cult of blurred youth, Where tongues of hatred, licking each

other's brain' ('My India'), are fantastic in their rich imagery and deep sense of social and national consciousness. The poet wants all Indians to be united and love their land, above everything else. In this landmark poem, 'My India', he wants the blind prodigal sons and deaf delinquents to return to the path of religious harmony and humanity. His most memorable poems include, 'Mystery of Me Divine', 'My India', 'Your Eyes', and 'Moonlight Meandering'. Poetry reaches its zenith in 'Moonlight Meandering'.

Eminent academicians, who are accomplished creative writers like Dr. T.V. Reddy and Dr. K.V. Raghupathy, have all contributed to the movement that CPC has become.

The Chennai Poets Circle is no longer just a group of poets from South India but it has become a movement for the promotion of English poetry in India and has started to become a part of global English consciousness. The poetry by CPC has messages for the entire world. Dr. T.V. Reddy's recent book, 'A Critical Survey of Indo-English poetry' is a path breaking book. There have been other important pillars of CPC like Shri. D. Chandrasekaran, I.A.S. (retired), Shri. Mohan Kumar, Former Chief Secretary of Kerala and Shri. Srinivasa Rangaswami, too. It is important to acknowledge the significant contributions of Dr. S. Kannan, former academician and writer Dr. S. Radhamani, eminent poet Shri Jairam Seshadri, Mrs. Hema Ravi and B.Jayaraman.

The life of CPC is in the poems by its poets. Other eminent poets of CPC include Abraham Patrick, Jairam Seshadri, V.Anand Kumar, Andal Priyadarshini, Anis Fathima, Dr.Chitra Anand, Dr.Ezhilvendan, Ms. Fathima Begum, Kedar Nath Sharma, Dr. Molly Joseph, Padmaja Iyengar, K. Pankajam, Ramesh Anand, Reshma Ramesh, N.V. Subbaraman and others. Dr. S. Padmapriya born in Tamilnadu, India is an integral part of CPC. She started to write poems in English in Bangladesh at the age of seven. Bengal with its mighty rivers, lakes, rains, cyclones, sweet language, pleasant people, sweets like rosogolla, roshomollai and mishti doi, rich colours and culture made her a poet. In essence, Bangladesh made her a poet and her beautiful native land, India has helped her to remain a poet. It was her mother, who encouraged her to keep writing poems. Her poems have been getting regularly published both in India and abroad since her fifteenth year. It was Dr. Krishna Srinivas, who encouraged her talent by publishing her poem, 'The Peepal Tree', which she wrote at the age of nine, in his journal, 'Poet' at the age of fifteen. It was her first published poem. She has been associated with Prof. Dr. M. Thirumeni since 2003, when as a student of The Ethiraj College, Chennai; she had gone to The Presidency College to learn prosody from him. She has three collections of poetry to her credit.

Conclusions:

1. The Chennai Poets' Circle is one of the important movements assisting in the Revival of English poetry in India.
2. Poets from all over India come to read their poems and present research papers at the annual seminar of CPC. The CPC provides a fair platform for a national discussion about current trends in English poetry in India along with providing a platform for meritorious poets without any bias or prejudice.
3. National newspapers like 'The Hindu', 'Deccan Chronicle' and 'The Times of India' have commended the literary activities of CPC in their literary section.

4. The CPC is no longer just a niche group contributing to the growth of English poetry in India and is slowly and surely entering the global literary consciousness.

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Declaration I, Dr.S.Padmapriya declare that the above research paper submitted by me is original and has neither been ever published nor been submitted for publication