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LESS KNOWN INDIAN WRITERS IN ENGLISH: NEW FINDINGS

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Abstract

This research paper intends to introduce three Indian writers in English of the mid twentieth century, who have contributed significantly to the field, yet are still unknown to the academia. The paper introduces these authors and attempts a stylistic analysis of their representative works to prove that they are at par with their contemporary writers in content and form. The paper exhorts the academia to bring these writers to the mainstream.

Keywords: Less known, Kuvempu, Sir M Visweswaraya, T P. Kailasam

The writers this paper intends to introduce are dead at least twenty five years ago. But they and their works are unknown or less known to the enthusiasts of Indian writing in English, critics and scholars.

K R Srinivasa Iyengar's celebrated work "*Indian Writing in English*" is a prescribed textbook in almost all Indian universities at MA level. Other books like, "*A Concise History of Indian Literature in English*" by Mehrotra, and

other writers like M K Naik, Joya Chakravarthy, A N Dwivedi, Mohit Kumar Ray etc, Several reference books and ready-reckoners, make an extensive study of all Indian writers in English. For a serious academician, the repetition of the names of writers in these books reassure that the Indian writers' list is explored, analyzed, made exhaustive and nothing more remains to be explored.

Indian writing in English is a flourishing genre of literature that is increasingly drawing global attention. Every now and then a new star is born in the firmament of literature. However, when we speak about the Indian writers in English of the yester years, the scholars seem to have drawn a final line and have declared a well-defined set of recognized well known writers. They are probably even convinced that there could not be any more writers than they have listed out.

On the contrary, there have been several Indian writers who wrote good amounts of literature in English, but still the literary world is not aware of such writers and their works, who deserve to be

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recognized, honoured and brought to the main stream.

The list of about 270 writers prepared by *Wikipedia* as English language writers from India does not include these writer's names. There are many such competent Indian writers in English within Karnataka, who have not come to lime light for several reasons. Such similar examples may certainly be found in the other vernacular states as well.

It is time the academia identifies such writers and brings them to the main-stream of writers. Their publications are inaccessible, and the local critics review, and honour their writings in regional vernacular, but they keep their English works, as not their cup of tea. This provides a virgin field of literary analysis. This was really fortunate for me and unfortunate for these writers, that they had to wait until I introduced them to the literary enthusiasts. At the outset, let me briefly introduce the names of these reputed yet unknown writers of English. There are two more writers in this category whom I have not introduced in this paper, confining myself to the expected length of the paper.

Kuvempu: His two anthologies, '*Alien Harp*', and '*Beginner's Muse*' are available only in the volume two of '*Samagra Kavya*' published by the University of Mysore. But, they have not been published as

independent anthologies of English poems. Not many people know Kuvempu as an Indian writer in English. There are no critical articles or papers on his poems in English hitherto. None of his English poems are available online.

T P Kailasam: There is only one website (tpkailasam.blogspot.com) where all his poems in English are available. There is only one book published by the Mysore University in 1987, '*Kailasam Krithigalu*' edited by Dr. H Tipperudra swamy, in which we find these poems. But unfortunately, let alone books, hitherto, no criticism, or research papers are available on his poems in English. Though his poems are so rich and good, they have never been included in any syllabus at any level.

Sir. M Visveswaraya needs no introduction. He was an internationally reputed engineer, whose birthday is celebrated all over India as Engineers' day, on 15th September. His engineering marvels stay strong and functional in several parts of the country even today. However, not many people know that he has written an autobiography of about **175 pages**, in English.

I have written and published papers on his autobiography making a stylistic analysis of tone and tenor of his chaste English comparing it with other autobiographies of his period. Sir MV's work seems to be influenced by Nehru's *Autobiography* which was published much before

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,“*Memoirs of My Working Days*” as MV also has preferred to make an account only of his professional ventures and hardly anything about his private life and childhood. I strongly wish to give Sir. the status of an Indian writer in English for his , ‘*Memoirs of My Working Days*’taking into account the chastity of language and his contribution to the country. While the works of politicians and philosophers are considered as literature, this autobiography of an engineer may also be treated as mainstream literature of Indian Writing in English.

As Sir M V himself has called it a memoir, it is not a full length autobiography. It revolves around a specific time, place or relationship. More limited than the autobiography, it focuses on an important part of one’s life. Sir M Visvesvaraya’s memoir is typical of its genre. Sir MV wrote his memoirs in the year 1951. By then J.Nehru had written his autobiography in the year 1936, and Mahatma Gandhi’s experiments were published in 1927. Sir MV’s work seems to be influenced by Nehru’s Autobiography which was published much before „*Memoirs of My Working Days*” as MV also has preferred to make an account only of his professional ventures and hardly anything about his private life and childhood.

M.V was aware of the changes that were taking place in science and technology, and

he was also aware of the rapidly increasing population in the country. He was alarmed about the mouths to be fed and the low working power of our country despite growing population. So, He stressed on educating the people and adapting advanced science to save the country from economic crisis. He had concern for the development of the country to be at par with the first world countries. He had visualized, that a sound practical knowledge of world affairs was the need of the hour.

The Memoir begins with the record of his first entry into government service and the further chapters account for the various challenging tasks he undertakes and accomplishes with an overwhelming success. At the end of his memoirs, Sir MV **has added three chapters** which is an unusual feature for a work of this nature. They deal with the national problems and are not directly related with the main purport of the book. But MV justifies that those chapters suggest some of the lessons which he has learnt through experience and observation for the application to the national life of the country.

The content and form of his writing, the chastity of the language is at par with any contemporary Indian writer in English. It is not necessarily needed for an author to write voraciously. Writers like *Harper Le*, *Anna Sewell*, and *Emile Bronte*, have proved their superiority as writers with their

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solitary contributions. It is a great disgrace to India and more so to Sir MV, because let alone bringing his memoirs into the main stream of Indian writing in English, not many of the educated Indians know that this BharathRatna has written his memoirs.

The fact that the contents of autobiographies are from real life, that is, actual happenings which were not 'created' by their authors, does not make the artistic autobiography any less artistic than the novel or the poem, for instance. Indeed, the actual arrangement of the story; what events to record and in what order; what details to expunge – all require even more challenging levels of artistic imagination from the author, and these are of significant interest to stylistics.

Sir M V's writing is not ornamental with figures of speech or studded with learned length and thundering words. It has the clarity and dignity of a journalistic style. His writing has the precision and accuracy of a scientist. Never in his memoirs, is MV's writing emotional or ambiguous. Even in instances where he has been wronged, M V retains the dignity of a scholar and remains composed in his narration. Lucid and explicit mode of writing of MV makes the memoirs readable. The sentence structures are hardly ever involved and misleading. They are journalistically crisp and short. This consistency is maintained all through his

work. The language is treated very formally. The generous use of the passive voices has helped him to maintain his impersonal narrative style and also it has helped him to avoid the mentioning of certain names in several occasions. The major domain of the text is referential as he has deliberately avoided either being too personal or too emotional. The best part of MV's writing is, despite his technical background, he has wisely avoided met linguistic language. Even in instances where he had to use technical jargons, he has restrained from it. He knew his target readers were laymen and so he has employed the simplest of the language to explain the most complicated concepts.

The last three chapters have a different tenor which has a conative function in persuading Indian masses into an awakened society. These chapters have suggestions for the nation about the problems concerning the future of India. As early as 1950's he had visualized the threat of rapid growth of population and the fall in the food grain production. He suggested 'grow more food' campaigns. In order to grow more crops without depending on the rains, he suggested to have reservoirs. He also suggests rural industrialization. MV suggests Planned Parenthood association. In all his suggestions for a healthy and sound growth of India his tenor gets conative with a persuading motive. The language is very effectively and gently

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used. With all these merits of language chastity, charity of presentation and interesting incidents and projects all along the career, this memoirs could be taken to the mainstream and be included academically for study in the syllabus or a few excerpts may be included in the text books. This work has the status of being considered one of the great Indian writings in English.

Kuvempu as an Indian Writer in English

Kuvempu has written over sixty poems spread across two anthologies in English, yet he is not known even to people of his own state as an English writer. Otherwise, he is one of the most revered poets of Kannada literature. Almost all Indians have at least heard of Kuvempu. He is the first Jnanapeetha award winner of Kannada and his caliber is unparalleled in Kannada literature. Probably, it was his success and reputation in local vernacular that overshadowed his prowess to write in English.

Kuvempu, began his literary career as a poet in English. He was under the impression that Kannada language was not rich enough to write good literature. He was under the impression that Kannada language was innately inadequate to write any literature of significance. So, he chose to write in English, and encouraged by his high school teachers and elders he continued to write until he met an Irish poet

James H Cousins, who had come to Mysore on some work. When the young K V Puttappa showed his poems to him for his opinions and suggestions, with a great anticipation of compliments and appreciation, Cousins suggested him to try to write in his mother tongue.

He was of the opinion that K V Puttappa could definitely do better in his own mother tongue, and no language by itself will be poor or inadequate. It lies in the hands of the poets and writers who can enrich it. K V Puttappa took Cousins' suggestion seriously and started to write in his mother tongue thereafter.

It would be too hypothetical to say what would have happened if KV Puttappa had continued to write in English ignoring his suggestions. But, we have before us, his sixty poems to assess his worth as a writer in English. But, was Cousins sensible and wise in giving Kuvempu the suggestion to write in Kannada? Why at all should kuvempu have taken his suggestion so seriously? Cousins suggested him to try his hand in Kannada true, but did he ask him to stop writing in English altogether?

Though the purposes were different, Ngugi and Kuvempu both gave up writing in English and chose to write in their mother tongue. Though Ngugi knew he could reach a larger mass of readers of the entire world by choosing to write in the lingua franca of the world, he restrained from doing so as it

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appeared to him, using English was a clear sign of colonial hangover. He wanted to decolonize his mind. Today, Ngugi is known to the world not just by his writing in English, but also by his writing in his mother tongue KIKUYU, which the world knows through its translations.

Kuvempu too, never ventured writing in English ever since the Cousins' encounter, but today he is known to the world by the works in Kannada through their translations. But Kuvempu's original writings have vanished into the world of oblivion.

Since the purpose of today's lecture is to exhort people to consider Kuvempu as an Indian writer in English, I wish to analyse two of his English poems:

WAKE ME UP

from *Alien Harp*

Wake me up from my dream,
Mother, wake me up,
Lest I should tremble and scream
And fall from thy lap!
Terrible scenes are passing
Before my dreaming eye;
Life's ocean-waves are tossing
My frail cradle high.
O Wake me up, Mother,
Wake me from my dream;
Visions and phantoms smother:
O the blood-red gleam!
Wake me up from my dream,

Mother, wake me up,
Lest I should tremble and scream
And fall from thy lap!
(March 13, 1925.)

I have chosen this poem for analysis for several reasons. Kuvempu is termed as a nature poet, as, a large bulk of his poems has the theme of nature. This poem is distinct from it. The poem is set in an improbable situation. As the child is at the same time both in conscious and unconscious state. The child is dreaming, yet, is aware of it and is conscious of the consequences of its dream.

This dramatic monologue of the sleeping child to his mother is like Dante's *inferno*, or T S Eliot's *Love song to J. Alfred Prufrock* which is narrated in an improbable situation. The child is in deep sleep, dreaming and probably it has not even learnt to speak. The persona of the poem is such a child. The very setting of the poem is new to the age and distinct from the conventional theme tagged to him as his favorite.

The rhyme scheme of this four quatrain poem is regular, with abab, cdcd..pattern. The poem is suggestive of some premonition from which he wants to be saved by his mother. The poem at once reminds us of Louis Mac Niece's '*prayer before birth*' which was written in 1944, while Kuvempu had written this poem in 1925.

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If the superficial meaning of the poem is just a threat of falling down from his mother's lap, the real, deeper and suggestive meaning would be the harsh cruelty of the world outside, which the child is subject to face as it grows up. Louis Mac Niece's unborn child in the womb, and the sleeping child in her mother's lap, both shudder to think about the cruelty that is in store for them when once it comes out of her mother's care and nurture. The scary dreams are prophetic of the bloodshed and global tension. (Just a few years ago the First World War had ended.). So, wake me up gains a significance. It is not physically waking him up to avoid him from experiencing the nightmare. It is a plea to teach him the trick of diplomacy, unlearning his innocence and preparing him to brave the world.

The diction of the poem is fresh and original, bearing no influence of the Romantic poets. The term "Life's Ocean waters are tossing", appear a bit outlandish. No English poet would use this term. The multiple nominal modifiers used and the metaphor of comparing life to an ocean and its waves, itself, is typically of Indian. This poem was written in 1925 when Kuvempu was just 21 years old. Considering both the period and age, this poem is at par with any recognized literature of Indian writing in English.

Let us consider the poem "*Happy-go-lucky*" written in 1914, by Kuvempu when he was hardly eleven years old:

Happy –Go-Lucky

Hang the teachers, damn the schools
And burn the sense-less books!
Scientists? A set of crazy fools
With dark and hungry looks!
Philosophers? Ah they are rogues
who doze and speculate;
Who write their bulky dry prologues
That life must end soon or late!
And Mathematics! A non-sense
That begins but ends nowhere!
They must be burnt: each one a dunce
Who thinks he's wisdom's own heir!
Away with Muse and her mad sons
Who eat and roam and dream:
Poetry! A collection of their funs
Deception is their theme!
A set of lunatics are they
Who hypnotise for money;
Joy, beauty, love virtue and play
Are mere names for villainy!
Economy is robber's art,
A civil name for plunder;
Theft lurks in every rascal's heart
Disguised as thrift! O wonder!

The poem begins with shocking imperatives which arrogantly declares all faculties and intellectuals are snobbish. He outright condemns each one of the faculty as senseless. He not only condemns scientists and philosophers, he rejects the subjects like mathematics, poetry and economics too. He

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calls mathematicians as dunces, poets as mad and economists as villains who plunder and thieve. The poet concludes that all those faculties of learning are euphemistic terms for plunder and villainy. All subjects seem to the poet as having some theft! Though the theme is different, the poem has the form and treatment of a metaphysical poem with an outright accusation. To have such an aversion towards subjects of study, at an early age of eleven is astounding.

The reader expects the poet to approve of at least one subject at the end of the poem, which is beyond comment and worth studying, but the poet seems to have no such designs. A regular rhyme scheme is followed all through the six-quatrain poem. A non-challant, light hearted attitude of the poet is depicted in the poem and hence the title.

Of the two anthologies, his first one written very early in his life has just six poems and a prelude. '*The Alien Harp*' the second anthology, consists of fifty-five poems and the themes chosen are variegated and local. He has certainly written a few poems that looks like the rehash of some Romantic poems, which could give an impression to the readers that he has no originality and is just juggling with the existing lexis of the Romantic poets, and their borrowed experiences and syntax. But a large majority of his poems exhibit his strong

originality of thought and creative prowess, with local themes.

The themes he has chosen for poems are astounding: for example, he has written on river Tunga, Thimma the cowherd, ground-nut seller, way to Chamundi hills, Swami Vivekananda and a poem dedicated to Chittaranjan Das, (popularly known as Deshbandhu Das). There are more representative poems of Kuvempu in the anthology which proves his ability and skill as an Indian writer in English better than any of his other contemporaries.

We can include introducing poems of Kuempu in our syllabus of English texts and give him the honour which he has been deprived of till now. A serious study of his English poems is necessary.

The next writer I intend to introduce is **T P Kailasam**, a relatively familiar writer, known for his drama both in Kannada and English. Considering the bulk, the contribution of T P Kailasam to the English writing is very little. His entire writing in English is about 216 pages and he has written only fifteen very short poems that run up to 19 pages. Four of his plays in English *The Burden*, *Fulfilment*, *The Purpose* and *The Brahmin's Curse* make 197 pages, and with only the remaining 19 pages of his poetry could be difficult to claim to call him an Indian poet in English.

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Let us first examine how he is assessed as a Kannada playwright. T P Kailasam's works essentially are contemporary and relevant to the present society. Tyagaraja Paramasiva Kailasam is reputed as a great humourist in Kannada. Born in 1884, in Mysore to a high court judge, was a gifted artist. Throughout his career as a student he was very bright and secured first rank and won awards all along. He studied Geology in London in 1909, by his scholarship sponsored by the then Government of Karnataka. Even in England, he secured a Gold medal in Geology, from the Royal Geological Society of London.

With these accolades he got a job when he came back to India, but he resigned it and called himself unemployed and unemployable. He took up literary writing as his full-time affair.

He is celebrated for his sense of humour. His first play *TolluGatti* written in 1918, created ripples in the field of Kannada drama. It reached the common man hitherto literature was just for the elite. He was the first person in Kannada drama to use colloquial usage of Kannada and code mixing of English. His Kannada plays consisted of marginalized characters that hold a mirror to the contemporary society and exposing its evil practices. While his English plays chose topics and characters from the great Indian epics. His plays are a blend of satirical humour with realism and Idealism.

There are sparingly a few reviews and critiques of the plays of T P Kailasam, where as there is not a single article published anywhere about his poems. Let's try to make a close reading of one of his poems.

Truth Naked

WE call thee 'brother', Scavenger;
We lie, believe us not:
Would we dare set our kindred on
The task that is thy lot?

We call thee 'friend', O Scavenger;
We lie, believe us not:
Thy Home reeks ranker than Latrines,
And we reckon not a jot.

We call thee 'hero', Scavenger;
We lie, believe us not:
A soul that conquers flesh is not
A carrion-feeding sot.

Until we callous callid brutes
For dread of Wrath Divine,
Desist from crime of coz'ning thee
To play the human swine;

Until thy sodd'n eyes do awake
To thine own manliness,
Our cant of "brother", "hero", "friend",
Is balderdash, no less!

Truth Naked is a 20 line poem with five quatrains. There is a regular rhyme in the

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second and fourth line of each stanza. There is a refrain in the middle of the stanza that appears only in the first three stanzas.

The theme chosen is topical for today. The persona of the poem uses the first person narration and identifies himself in plural form, in which he actually is not a part! The WE in the poem refers to pseudo-sympathizers who speak of bringing equality, and boast of being the “Voice of the voiceless”, but they are not really so. The persona knows how they pretend and the coming lines convince the reader that he is the really concerned person. The word ‘Scavenger’ is treated as a proper noun of an individual, even by beginning it with a capital letter. This is a generic reference to all the downtrodden people of his profession.

Considering the period in which this poem was written by T P Kailasam, we realize how socially aware, revolutionary and broad-minded he was, during as early as in 1923. Mulk Raj Anand’s celebrated work, *Untouchable* was published in 1935. And *Coolie* later followed next year, in 1936. So T. P Kailasam is one of the pioneers of writers who evoked the Dalit consciousness in Indian English writing . But unfortunately very few people know him. Almost a decade before Mulk Raj Anand critically examined and exposed the deplorable task of carrying night-soil by a particular section of the was society, in his

novel, T P Kailasam had already written this short poem covering this vital point in an epitomized way. He questions boldly if anyone, who shows lip-sympathy to the Scavenger, would ever dare expect or allow their children do the task those scavengers are doing. He argues that only can they call him brother, or friend or hero.

It needed a great amount of courage and broadminded attitude to question the pseudo – revolutionaries of his contemporary period. The poet proceeds in his next stanza to compare the hygiene of the Scavenger’s home to the latrines he cleans every day. We realize that the sensitive poet has observed the disheartening and poor living conditions which are without any exaggeration, worse than the public latrines that he attends to.

He proceeds in the next stanza to say that those fake people who make a hero out of this drunkard who feeds on putrefying meat, have never seriously planned to improve the living conditions. It is merely the oral encouragement and words of praise that they shower on him. These insensitive and unsympathetic people who do not even have a moral fear, have not realized that God is angry with them for making these human beings mere virtual pigs that feed on filth and cleanse it. T P Kailasam concludes the poem, with a remark that only when these Scavengers whose eyes are always drowned with tears

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and poverty, awake and protest, some natural justice can be provided to them. If they do not, all the endearing and fake words like brother, hero and friend, are meaningless.

T P Kailasam has clearly criticised the rising trend in vogue in his period where the sympathizing leaders gain the status of heroes, in the public eye, with mere words and no action. We conclude with a remark that T P Kailasam's above poem, Truth Naked is at par or even more superior to any poem written in his contemporary period. Both in terms of the topical social relevance of the poem and the very style of presentation with all the

stylistic flourishes deserve to be considered as a major poet in IWE. And this deserves to be included in the college syllabus.

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