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Fusion Sonnets and Fourteeners: The Reimagining of the Poetry Forms in Indian English Literature

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Abstract

This paper analyses the fusion form of sonnet that has traditionally been identified as a strict fourteen lines lyric poem or "little poem" with disciplined pattern of iambic pentameter. In the present time of Indian poetry, the sonnet form has become more creative and progressive rather than merely imitative or translated. The study focuses upon Sonnet Mondal's twenty-one-line sonnet along with the rising of fourteener and other new Indian sonnet forms that are associated with Arbind Kumar Chaudhary. The result of these experiments in traditional poetry functions as dynamic creativity rather than just a restricted pattern to follow.

Keywords: lyric, symbol, poetry, love and tradition.

Introduction:

The Renaissance gifted the Italian poet Giacomo da Lentini with a new writing form of love poetry in the thirteenth century. But it was Francesco Petrarch who polished the sonnet into an enduring art. Petrarch used the themes of pain, beauty and unfulfilled love with human emotions using the canvas of fourteen lines. The traditional Petrarchan sonnet was divided into an eight-line octave (problem) followed by a six-line sestet (resolution). The best example of the traditional sonnet is Petrarch's most acknowledged sonnet, "Sonnet 134: Pace non trovo, et non o da far Guerra" (I Find no Peace), a masterpiece of emotional paradox that defines the psychological anguish of courtly love.

The sonnet reached in Britain with the influence of the Renaissance, and poets and writers like Sir Thomas Wyatt, Henry Howard and the Earl of Surrey adapted it and shifted the rhyme schemes according to the language requirement. William Shakespeare transformed the structure into three quatrains and one rhyming couplet. He made famous the form with his giant collection of sonnets of 154. By the seventeenth century, John Milton received this rich form of poetry and revived the forgotten form of the Petrarchan sonnet with contemporary themes of personal human emotions, political issues and spirituality. With his pen, the sonnet took the shape from a delicate love letter into a

powerful expression of justice, faith and eternal truth. His most famous sonnet, "On His Blindness" or "Sonnet 19," expresses his thoughts about his sudden blindness and his devotion to the ultimate power of divinity. He writes in the sonnet, "They also serve who only stand and wait" (142).

Indian Sonnet:

The transformation of the sonnet from age to age proves that the centuries-old Italian origin poetic form is not restricted but progressive and flexible, holding the voice of human emotions. Indian poets and authors came into awareness about this poetry form through colonial education, literature and the English language. Poets like Henry Derozio, Michael Madhusudan Dutt and Toru Dutt employed the sonnet with notable technical patterns. Toru Dutt, in her poem "The Lotus," uses the Petrarchan pattern while engaging Indian themes such as floral symbolism.

The Indian sonnet is understood as a translated form of the British Sonneteers besides an individual creativity of literature. It imported the structure of the poem but designed it with Indian philosophy, culture, concepts, myths and vernacular rhyming. It changes the nature of the poem, its tone, imagery and tendency of readers to read it.

In India, the sonnet has been written in almost every language of regions, including Hindi, Urdu, Assamese, Bengali, Dogri, Gujarati, Kannada, Kashmiri, Malayalam, Marathi, Nepali, Odia and Sindhi. The sonnet has repeatedly been accommodated in vernacular and regional prosodies and poetic tradition despite the English influence.

Michael Madhusudan Datt established the sonnet as a major vehicle for modern Indian literary expression using the form in the Bengali language. Toru Dutt later adopted the form into her mythic and natural imagery-based poetry. In her poem, "Lotus," the rose and lily symbolically fused into the flower lotus, an Indian sacred flower that is associated with the nation's cultural diversity. The poem ends with the line, "- the queenliest flower that blows" (136). It is not merely a foreign form for Indian poets but a marker of plural linguistic inheritances and cultural memories.

The Fourteener:

The "Fourteener" is a different poetic form from the sonnet. It is a metrical line of fourteen syllables, usually organised as seven iambic feet or iambic heptameter. On the other hand, the conventional English sonnet is often associated with iambic pentameter. The Fourteener extends the length of the line and the narration. A poet of fourteener uses fourteen syllabic lines that contain seven iambic feet within a sonnet-like structure but with different rhythm, tone and pacing. This form was very common in writing in 16th- and 17th-century literature. But it became popular after George Chapman's translation of Homer's *Iliad*. In his critical work *Lives of English Poets*, Samuel Johnson mentions:

As these lines had their caesura always at the eight syllables, it was thought in time commodious to divide them; and quatrains of lines alternately consisting of eight and six syllables make the softest and pleasing of our lyric measures. (146)

The best example of the fourteener poetic form is "The Burning Babe" by Robert Southwell. The most marvellous lines of the poem are:

As I in hoary winter's night, stood shivering in the snow
Surprised I was with sudden heat which made my heart to glow;

And lifting up a fearful eye to view what fire was near,
A pretty Babe all burning bright did in the air appear; (32)

The lines are structured in a paradox of a freeing winter night and a burning infant that symbolises Jesus Christ. The poem explores the themes of human redemption and sacrifice for the world's sins. The last two lines of the fourteener also contain the fourteen syllables and end with the rhyming sounds:

With this he vanished out of sight and swiftly shrunk away,
And straight I called unto mind that it was Christmas day. (32)

In the Indian context, the fourteener negotiates with English metre with the cadence of Indian speech. The heptameter line permits great flexibility in writing because English iambic pentameter does not correspond naturally with Indian English pronunciation. It is a useful instrument for a hybrid poetry form that has aesthetic implications.

Indo- Anglian Parsi poet Behramji Malabari adopted the meter of the fourteener in his narrative and satirical poems to represent social evils like child marriage in his Gujarati poetry collection, *Pleasure of Morality*. These poems were about social reform and influenced by a preacher and missionary, John Wilson. His poetry collection, *The Indian Muse in English Garb*, received well-known recognition, especially by Lord Alfred Tennyson. Later, poets like Madhusudan Dutt experiment fourteen lines syllables in blank verse.

Fusion Sonnet:

Among contemporary Indian poets, Sonnet Mondal is striking with experiments in traditional sonnet form with his collection *21 Lines Fusion Sonnets of 21st Century*. His innovative fusion sonnet consists of a fourteen-line poem followed by a seven-lined half sonnet that is called a coda or tail.

The extension does not reject the canonical sonnet but adds some new, interesting twist. The first fourteen lines preserve the memory of the conventional form while additional lines create a resolution. Instead of the one decisive turn and closure, the poem offers a turn or a reflective space that complicate the conclusion of the initial fourteen lines.

The seven-lined coda ends with the fifth line and creates a recurrence-circular structure. Repetition is not merely aesthetic but it gives cohesion while allowing the deepening assertion. The fusion sonnet thus becomes both linear and recursive. It moves forward through additional lines but returns to its own verbal origin.

Unconventionally, Mondal's sonnet consists of pun and ambiguity rather than love or spirituality. His "Sonnet 5" explores the themes of social decay, oppression and modern class crisis. He expresses in his lines, "The steel cages rusted, rotted yet strong and bold" and "The well born meant to rule and the ill born destined to plough!" the raw human sufferings with cynical phrasing.

Mondal's sonnet perceives a single structure that contains traditional essence with modern freedom. His poems are 'architectures of conscience' in poetic sense with the contradictory themes as hope and loss, give up and return, memory and karma and doubt and answers. His poems are read as mystic piece of literature. Collections like *Karmic Chanting* and *Ink and Line* explore consciousness, soul with social and political dilemmas.

Mondal's dual orientation of inner life with outer crisis makes his sonnet suitable for political mysticism. The first ten lines of sonnet explore the tension of historical depression

and social injustice and free verse provides the space of freedom of imagination. Then his sonnets become the aesthetic marks engaging social motifs and dream like urgency with blend of nostalgia, concrete ideas and refusal of escape.

He is established as the “the first Indian to write a new type of Sonnet,” in Indian Book of Records, and has been familiar across more than thirty countries.

Arbindonean Sonnets:

A notable contemporary poetic development is the Arbindonean sonnet that is associated with Arbind Kumar Choudhary. It consists of seven rhymed couplets with foregrounding Indian cultural concerns. It is a completely different sonnet form from traditional Petrarchan, Shakespearean and Spenserian structure. It recalls the fourteen-line structure of the traditional form, but it follows a pair-rhyming scheme like Urdu couplet poems. Instead of an octave and sestet or three quatrains and a couplet, this sonnet form progress with couplet rhyming.

Choudhary's sonnet collections as *The Forgotten Champion*, *Mother India* and *The Poet*, stress upon the Indian culture, heritage, mythology and native vocabulary. In his sonnet “Earth,” he says, “The earth is the berth/ of a man of mirth/ for the hyacinth/ of the lovesmith,” and concludes with the couplet “all living and non-living objects/ are the pearls of the divine tracts.”

The significance of his poetry lies in his challenge to the assumption that a sonnet needs to improvise from colonial tradition. Therefore, the form is a subject of debate among critics about literary legitimacy, whether it is defined by inherited rules, historical function or capacity for renewal. He states in an interview, “Indianness is the nectar of my verses that makes me out and out an Indian English poet without doubt” (The Literature Times).

Reception and Critical Response:

It is a question of consideration how modification became a new form of sonnet. Sayanti Mondal raises the doubt that certain poems as “sonnets” can be confusing if they depart from standard structure of the poem. A useful critical approach should consider at least four points in a poem: 1. Does the poem retain fourteen lines or just revise the number? 2. Does it follow iambic pentameter or an alternative prosodic pattern? 3. Is there any middle, volta or coda or a sequence of turning subject? 4. How do Indian vernaculars, myth, culture and rhyming scheme reshape the traditional form?

Thus, the criteria allow readers to distinguish between innovation and exaggerated claims. A twenty-one lined poem may be called as a fusion sonnet if there are an additional seven lines that follow the basic sonnet structure and subject. It can be viewed as an improvised version of the Indian sonnet when its basic pattern creates a distinct argument and rhyming effect.

Comparison between two Contemporary Sonneteers:

Sonnet Mondal and Arbind Kumar Choudhary's sonnets represents two different but same genre to develop the tradition of sonnet form writing in Indian English Literature. One side Mondal's twenty-one lined fusion sonnets developed an extended version of coda with seven lines and on the other side Chaoudhary's Indianised version experiments with phrasal identity, mythical imagery and alternative rhyme scheme. In parallel, both innovations contribute in postcolonial tendencies to continue the prestige of the older form of sonnet.

Critics discern that Choudhary's final couplet following knitted structure of three rhymed quatrains produce a flow like garland of song. This is called "racy-style", re-rhyming couplet that perceives the assembled effect of the idea. The structure of sonnet suits to long and lengthy phrasal sequences in new cadence.

Chaoudhary's sonnets are commonly known as "fertile literary soil of India," in which he exhales cultural subversion of Indian, Greek and Roman mythology to create a postmodern idiom. In his collection, *Mother India*, 99 he deploys the themes of mythology, cultural grandeur and nationalism and creates national allegories with personal expressions. This blending of various themes what readers identify as "mythical messiahs" brings the sonnet on new heights of poetry.

Mondal's fusion sonnets refusing the western lyric system, frame the decolonising gesture to find a new alternative version. It prefers the open ending rather than traditional or cyclical resolution. So, both poets experiment in structural diversity to define the cultural calibre in poetry instead of blindly practicing it.

These two models, Fusion sonnet and Arbindonean sonnet, challenge the European traditional structure and practice of sonnet. Choudhary advocates that sonnet can be demonstrated, re-rhymed, re-phrased and revise in themes. And fusion sonnet shows that even extension in lines is possible without changing its true nature. Both writing styles validate the aesthetic effect of traditional sonnet poetry writing in Indian sense. These experiments pave a new way of Indian writings in English, cultural diversity, literature politics and gateway for new poetry in English. Both are capable of carrying fresh voices and wisdom to develop a new lyrical intensity.

Conclusion:

The fusion sonnet elucidates the fact that there has been a need for transformation to survive for art and literature. In the Indian context, the sonnet has shifted from colonial inheritance to a creative writing piece; Toru Dutt illustrated Petrarchan structure with Indian symbolism, Arbind Kumar Choudhary manifested an Indianised fourteen-lined structure, and Sonnet Mondal stretched it into twenty lines with an advanced coda structure.

The fourteener demonstrates the fact that the formal experiments can occur within the poetic line itself. By extended metre, pattern and changing rhyming scheme, the poet creates space for diversion in myth, diction and rhythms. The future of the Indian sonnet may therefore depend on preserving the essence of poetic form and adaptation of new experiments.

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