Conclusion: (Un-)Winding the Argument

I

Conclusion normally is a convention of closure. It tends to be a rather repetitive and reductive exercise of summing up of an argument that runs into pages. This danger of reductionism becomes all the more pronounced in comparative studies where differences/ resemblances between the binary components of study happen to be subtle and fine. Therefore "the test of a true operative in comparative criticism is not [his] ability to hazard hasty inferences about tenuous [dis-]similarities in literary works, but [his] extreme caution in vouching parallelisms [or contrasts] in a tentative way." Therefore in the present study 'conclusion' as a formal necessity is not (mis-)exploited simply to re-state and re-iterate the ideological/philosophical differences and varying levels of cultural perception between the protagonists of the two compared streams of poetry. Here conclusion leads the study forward by way of providing an occasion to speculate on the possible reasons responsible for the differences between the two streams of Indian poetry.

The pro-West leanings of the protagonist of modern Indian English poetry are perfectly understandable for reasons not so remote or nebulous to identify. Despite all recent attempts of its indigenization, English is not only structurally, aesthetically and culturally a different language from Hindi and other vernacular languages; it is alien too. And further it is not simply alien, it is colonial too. With these attributes, English has inherent limitations with regard to its suitability as medium of poetry in India. The hybridization of alien language and native experience can only generate ridiculous cultural distortions bordering on a caricaturization of the native. And in case of (Indian English) poets who believe poem to be an act of linguistic finesse first and foremost, the subtle nuances of the native cultural experience(s)
fall prey to the tyranny of alien linguistic 'order'. Such poetry revels in its linguistic achievement, attested and certified by the West.

The extra-ordinary linguistic concern of a modern Indian English poet is beyond any doubt. He hankers after the 'word': "The best poets wait for words." ("Poet, Lover, Birdwatcher", CP, p.135). A search for an "exact name" constitutes a basic tenet of his poetic practice. Ramanujan "often joked that poems were like babies, they dirtied themselves and he had to clean them up. He said it took him ten years to really finish a set of poems". Mahapatra too, to begin with, "was more enamoured of the language". For most of the contemporary Indian English poets, writing poem is a conscious exercise; its execution is programmatic. To Ramanujan, for instance, the poetic process is a phased programme in which first bones are picked up at random; in the second phase, "liver, lungs arteries/inferior and superior, veins blue and red, fountaining/ out of heart" etc. are attached; in the third phase the poem is "Engendered, lifelike but/ incapable, as it stood/ still, a mere effigy" and in the fourth phase life is breathed into it ("Fifth Man", CP(R), pp.243-45). With this concept of poetic diction as a laboured idiom and poetic process as an intellectual programme, the modern Indian English poets tend to look to either British or American poets for feedback. Eliot, Ezra Pound, Dylon Thomas, Auden, Wallace Stevens, William Carlos Williams etc. provide these poets the necessary poetic design and even inspiration. The more these poets become language-conscious, the more they gravitate towards Western standards of modern poetry.

New Hindi poets have an altogether different perspective on poetic theory. If the linguistic traditions of (Western) English poetry inspire the Indian English poets, the linguistic traditions of Hindi poetry inspire the new Hindi poets. The influence of West on new Hindi poetry is over-stretched. Here G.N. Devy's observation is pertinent: "... the beginning of modern literature in each bhasa is a result of the indigenous dynamics of that bhasa rather than a product of exogenous cultural pressures. In other words, though the impact of British literature on Indian literature is not quite insignificant.
the bhasas seem to have their own continuous histories, guided by their own inner dynamics." The views and practice of the three new Hindi poets undertaken reveals differences of these poets with their English counterparts on issues of poetic diction and poetic process.

Naresh Mehta, a new Hindi poet, well-entrenched in the traditions of Hindi poetry and ancient Vedic literature, always insists on transcending both word and its meaning in poetry. He asks, "How many of us know that poetry is a process of liberating language both from the word and its meaning?" In his Aranya, a collection of poems on poetic theory, he says, "Violation of word is poem." ("Ullanghan", p.9). In his elevated vision poetry is a "shabda-yajna" in which words dissolve into the poetic vision of the virat. Sarveshwar Dayal Saxena too does not confide in the powers of 'the word': "Fire runs through my veins/ words cannot express it./ Give me a knife,/ I shall cut my veins to reveal it." Even Bhavani Prasad Mishra does not believe in poetry that comes to a poet through effort. He is a poet of easy, simple, steady and effortless poetry.

Therefore linguistic dissimilarity is one of the major reasons of the two streams of poetry being different from each other. Absence of a tradition of indigenous English poetry, and their own unwillingness to learn from the tradition of various folk and regional literatures, turn Indian English poets to chase after British and American poets and their poetic ideals. In case of Hindi poetry, there is no such crisis of historylessness; the tradition as historical present impinges upon the creative consciousness of a Hindi writer controlling and containing his poetic fancies within the cultural continuum. The protagonist of this poetry is always informal, straight forward and clear headed because he is a product of an ethos of shruti and smriti; the protagonist of English poetry is always so formal and sophisticated because he is product of Western ethos of the 'written word'. Unless Indian English poets break away from the Western bandwagon to which they are presently hitched, they cannot create their own space. Moreover they will have to get over their obsession of linguistic finesse, because such an obsession will invariably take them back to West only. Only West can offer them models of linguistic finesse in the
language they write.

Another reason that possibly alienates Indian English poetry from the Indian ethos is its (privileged) site of production. This poetry comes to us though the corridors of University Departments located in big metropolitan cities. A simple survey of all the leading anthologies available on Indian English poetry would reveal a clear dominance of Bombay-based or Bombay-backed poets to the total exclusion of poets from smaller cities and towns. Bombay looms large almost as canon over this poetry. This spatial aberration, though favourable to Bombay-mafia, is extremely detrimental to the growth and evolution of this poetry in India. New Hindi poetry has no such privilege. This poetry comes to us from the remotest of village, town and city. True it is that in India, English poetry has a limited constituency both in terms of its readership and authorship for obvious socio-historical reasons, but monopolization of this poetry by a club of few poets is totally uncalled for.

What prevents the poets of smaller cities from coming to any limelight in the field of English poetry is snobbish attitude of the privileged poets who judge any fresh creative endeavour in terms of its linguistic finesse and stylistic innovations. Despite recent resurgence in publication of Indian English literature, the character of the literature remains same. The focus seems to have shifted to Delhi, Hyderabad, Madras, Banglore etc. but all of the new writers coming from these centres are either foreign-returned or convent educated. For a genuine indigenization of Indian English poetry, there is an urgent need to publish poets from smaller centres and even villages— the only legitimate cradle(s) of Indian sensibility. The linguistic finesse can wait, let this poetry grow in terms of sensibility first. This growth need not be vertical to begin with, its horizontal expansion is must. Only this can liberate this poetry from its own shackles. Secondly the control of academia over this poetry need be broken to allow poets from all walks of life to enrich its sensibility. Poetry should not be exploited for career.
Discovering dissimilarities in things similar covers only the first half of the argument. More important than this unwinding of pluralities is a search for common denominator or a broad cultural framework which could possibly inhere them. This search is a cultural necessity for mere exploration of divergences without a necessary foregrounding in some inclusive national paradigm, remains polemical as well as political. Let it be re-iterated that in the present study 'national' is not forsaken in favour of the 'local' despite the latter's markedly distinctive character. Nation, as maintained earlier (see Chapter 4, notes 1 ) is not dismissed as a myth or a fictional construct. An open non-prescriptive national paradigm compatible with our past traditions congruent with our present needs, and capable of indwelling the local/regional hues of Indian culture/ poetry need be evolved to underline their intrinsic innate affiliation with each other.

The concept of 'the unfinished man' with its already explained (see Chapter 2) philosophic and cultural dimensions could possibly be one such befitting concept capable of accounting for the different levels of growth of various streams of Indian culture/ poetry. This concept is not only in harmony with our philosophic credo of the evolution of ego, it is open-ended too. The protagonists of the two streams of poetry, despite their distinct levels of growth and cultural awareness could be described as 'unfinished men' engaged in the process of defining and re-defining themselves in their own distinct ways. As 'unfinished men' they are not supposed to be on the same pedestal. The ideal of 'the unfinished man' with dynamics of growth at its core, allows enough space and scope for future growth.

The application of the concept of 'the unfinished man' as a philosophic correlative to the evolving consciousness of the protagonist of Indian poetry can remove many misgivings. First it could be used as an alternative term / phrase/ concept to describe the state of the protagonist in new Hindi poetry hitherto described in derogatory and highly static paradigm of the 'dwarfed
being'. In fact most of the Hindi critics who discover high-modernism and elements of avant-garde in new Hindi poetry tend to describe the protagonist of this poetry on the lines of Western concept of anti-hero. Such descriptions are not only grossly simplistic, they are political too. Firstly new Hindi poetry as a contemporary extension of its tradition of thousand years, despite subtle influence of the West on it, cannot be solely described through overtly Western paradigms. The description of the protagonist as 'dwarfed being' does not account for the evolving credo of the personas of Sarveshwar, Bhavani and Naresh Mehta; nor does it befit well the Indian tradition of exceeding the self. Even Ramdarash Mishra, a leading critic of new Hindi poetry contests the relevance of the concept of dwarfed being thus:

If by dwarfed being, it is meant only to honour the dwarfed nature of man through a constant exploration of his pettiness, then it is definitely a false, extremist and reactionary vision of life. Healthy new Hindi poetry has never entertained this meaning of the dwarfed being.

In the light of our reading of new Hindi poetry, and in the larger context of Indian ethos of non-duality, 'unfinished man' could be one of the most appropriate alternative to the presently valorized 'dwarfed being'.

Occasional flashes of mysticism, socialism and political activism in the later poetry of modern Indian English poetry reveal a brewing unrest within this poetry. Indian English poets recognize the falsity of whoring after the English gods. A deep feeling of being cut-off from the roots constantly unsettles these poets. There is a definite clamouring for belongingness, for once again identifying with the native traditions and cultural ideals. But this clamouring lacks the essential conviction; it is born out of compulsion. Despite this lag, the protagonist of modern Indian English poetry too qualifies for the title of 'the unfinished man' in the sense that he too seeks to outgrow his present prototype of Prufrock towards a higher being. This protagonist with all his middle-class moorings and colonial hangovers as unfinished man is yet to break free from the bounds of intellect and rationalism. On an Aurobindonian graph of evolving consciousness, he would take off from the
infra-rational level to rational level of growth; his Hindi counter-part, however
goes higher towards the zone of the supra-rational.

III

The aim of the present comparative study is not limited to a close
analysis of the two streams of poetry in terms of differences and similarities;
rather it is to open fresh avenues in the field of criticism and pedagogy. The
study of one poetry through another is an alternative strategy of reading.
One partial end of this study has been to demonstrate the viability of such
a comparatist way of reading /criticizing. In the context of Indian literature(s)
this strategy of reading is indispensable and even inescapable. Any attempt
to seclude the study of literature in one local/ regional language from literature
in other Indian languages is bound to be monologic and even arbitrary.

The teaching of Indian English poetry without a reference to poetry in
other Indian languages is practically unthinkable. Unfortunately most of the
teachers desist from breaking the canon. A reference to Eliot, or to Shakespeare
is privileged in the class-room. The present study is aimed at breaking this
mindset. References to say a Galib or a Niral, or a Subramaniam Bharati
should not be looked down upon by the masters of Indian English literature
in India. The present study could well be seen as an attempt to legitimize
the teaching of Indian English poetry through the poetry written in other
Indian languages. The pedagogical ramifications of such an attempt are
enormous. The present study in a way seeks to set a new agenda of teaching/
reading of Indian English literature in India and even abroad. It is only a
beginning of this unfinished agenda.
Notes


2. Nissim Ezekiel's "Very Indian Poems in Indian English" are poems of caricaturization in which the simple minded, enthusiastic, naive Indian character is lampooned for speaking 'wrong' English.

3. Intelligence, give me
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The exact name, and yours,
And his, and mine, of things.
--John Ramon Jimenez, quoted by Nissim Ezekiel as an epigraph to *The Exact Name* (1965), *CP*, p.127.

4. Krittika Ramanujan, "Preface" to *CP(R)* p.XV.


6. Modern Indian English poets take pride in referring to these poets as their poetic mentors-

   (a) i. "While he always loved Yeats, in later life he [Ramanujan] preferred Wallace Stevens and William Carlos Williams" -- Krittika Ramanujan, "Preface" to *CP(R)*, p.xv


   (b) Bruce King mentions that "Mahapatra, along with Chitre in some poems, appears to have learned from Robert Bly and other American poets of the late '60s and early '70s a new means of using the external world to present subjective feeling .... They spoke of organizing by
'field', itself a poetic derived from William Carlos Williams and Pound, ---", MIPE, p.198.


9. Naresh Mehta, "Introduction" to Aranya, p.i.


11. "The lack of a live critical tradition is a disturbing feature of English poetry in our country, and is greatly responsible for the mediocrity and general confusion that prevails. Except for stray, sporadic poems dating to the nineteenth century, contemporary English poetry had nothing sacred to fall back upon. Hence the sentiments existing in Georgian verse served as grandiose examples for many of our Indian poets." - Jayanta Mahapatra, "The Inaudible Resonance in English Poetry in India", The Literary Criterion, p.33.

12. "Most English poetry in this country fails because our poets are simply unaware of the society from which the poetry emerges; because being city poets they deal with the basically uninspiring middle-class, and their poetry turns out to be equally uninspiring ;they produce a kind of 'willed' poetry that is forced out of their selves and which ignores the rural psyche." -- Ibid. p.34.

13 K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar exposes the politics of anthologizing thus:

"Two anthologies, however, stand a little apart: (1) Ten Twentieth Century Indian Poets, chosen and edited by R. Parthasarathy, 1976; and (2) Two Decades of Indian Poetry: 1960-1980, edited by Keki N.Daruwalla,1980. The latter, with its heavy concentration of Parsi and Bombay-centred poets, as also of expatriates, excluded Pritish Nandy, and provoked a massive onslaught by the aggrieved poet in the columns
of *Sunday*; and Daruwalla replied with equal ferocity. This throwing
about of brains led to a brief comment by a reader in *Sunday* that it
was a case of "one literary goonda" attacking another, leaving it free
for the 'common reader' to enjoy the work of Toru Dutt, Sarojini Naidu
and other poets of yesterday. Parthasarathy's anthology too has had
its critics. Fourteen out of the "50 odd poems" in the anthology are his
own, and reviewing his book, Vinay Dharwadkar said (Indian and Foreign
Review May 1977, p.21): "Seven sections (from R.Parthasarathy's Rough
Passage) are placed in the anthology to represent the poet, and are
prefaced by a critical note by Parthasarathy himself, a violation of
editorial ethics'. Like other anthologists, Daruwalla too believes that
generosity, like charity, begins at home. He is among his select
seventeen, and gets 12 pages, while Kamala Das has to be content
with 8, Nissim Ezekiel 10; Jayanta Mahapatra(probably the best of
them all) gets 7, and A.K. Ramanujan a mere 4 pages. In the prefatory
note about himself, Daruwalla proclaims: "For me a riot-stricken town
is landscape .." Bravo! "Writing" he says elsewhere, "is like a clot going
out of the blood". Bravo again!

Look at the titles of the two anthologies. "Two Decades of Indian
Poetry" -- not Indo-Anglian, or Indo-English, but 'Indian' "Look!" Daruwalla
seems to announce; "we the exhibited seventeen are the sovereign
poetic voices of contemporary India." Parthasarathy's title is even more
audacious: "Look, Look! I and my fellow-nine are 20th Century Poetry-
India". I wonder how respectable firms like Vikas and OUP can acquiesce
in such exercises in misleading the unwary public.

Once adroit spirits like Daruwalla and Parthasarathy decide to
reduce the several hundreds of practitioners of poetry to a mere
seventeen or ten while finding for themselves safe and roomy
anchorages, the reader in a hurry finds his task drastically simplified
-- indeed to the point of absurdity. But this is not all. These anthologists-
cum-poets are also critics who are only too ready to assume the god,
affect the nod, and seem to shake the spheres. They not only write
about themselves with pardonable gusto, but they also don't hesitate
to charge at others with whipped-up vehemence". -- K.R. Srinivasa
Iyengar, "Indian Poetry in English: Yesterday-Today-Tomorrow", The

14. In Rohtak only, there are many poets writing in English. Madan Gopal
Gandhi, N.K.Rattan and Subba RAO have written more than twenty
collections of poetry together. Yet they do not figure anywhere in the
mainstream Indian English Poetry for reasons overtly political. Merit
or no merit, due to metropolitan hegemony, the non-metropolitan poets
receive no critical attention.

15. Is it [a poem] a commodity
to craft your personality
or to brighten your character
or a thing
to earn your livelihood?
No, brother, no,
poem
is a courtesy
to be human
in language.

-- Sudama Pandey 'Dhoomil', Sansad se Sarak
(tak)

16. The 'dwarfed being' is described as an existential being engaged in
the human pursuit of self preservation. He is portrayed as a man of
average human values. New Hindi poetry is described as "an expression
of a dwarfed being's mundane environment generated by the ideals of
man-centered consciousness, [it is an expression of] a being who suffers
the agonies and the oddities of life; but one who struggles to preserve
his self amidst these oddities". -- Laksmi Kant Verma in Hindi Sahitya
Kosh, ed. Dr. Dhirendra Verma, Dr. Dharamvir Bharati et al. (Banaras:


19. In fact most of the new Hindi poets express their displeasure for being branded as poets of 'the dwarfed being' -- a being interpreted as an ordinary, mundane existential being sans any spirituality. Raghuvir Sahay observes:

> Every serious and unartificial modern artist is aware of that virat responsibility which the tradition has bestowed on him. As a result of this awareness of this virat responsibility, he is able to locate an entire image of life in each ordinary human episode or human unit. A small being is not an easy being. Exploiting man as a raw material for art is an onerous task and incidently it is an enterprise to understand the virat -- (quoted by Suresh Sharma in *Raghuvir Sahay ka Kavi-karma*, Delhi: Peoples Literacy, 1981, p.19).

Jagdish, the pioneer of the term of 'Nai Kavita', also thinks that 'dwarfed' as an adjective qualifying 'man' is affronting to man's pride. He says: "The meaningfulness of calling a man, a human being, is nullified by the addition of this adjective 'dwarfed'" -- (Nai Kavita: Swaroop aur samasyaien, Delhi: Bhartiya Jhanpith, 1972, pp.19-20). He wants to replace the desogatory 'dwarfed' with 'steady'.

Critics like Ramvachan Rai (mis) quote Dr. Lohia as the founder of the concept of 'the dwarfed being'. Dr Rai refers to Lohia's statement -- "I have nothing except that in this country ordinary people understand me, I am their own man" (quoted by Dr. Ramvachan Rai, *Nai Kavita: Udbhava aur Vikas*, Patna: Bihar Hindi Granth Akademi, 1974, p.180)
-- as the root of the philosophy of 'the dwarfed being'. Firstly, 'ordinary' cannot be equated with 'dwarfed'. Secondly, Lohian ordinary man is a socialized being, he is not an isolated neurotic existential being. Even this Lohian concept of 'Ordinary Man' is a much more a relevant option than the present concept of 'the dwarfed man'.

20. Aijaz Ahmad also thinks along the same lines:

In a parallel understanding, English Literature needs to be studied in close relation with the history of modern literatures in India itself, and indeed all forms of Indian writing, ... It is only by submitting the teaching of English Literature to the more crucial and comparatist discipline of Historical and Cultural Studies, and by connecting the knowledge that literature with literatures of our own, that we can begin to break that colonial grid and to liberate the teachers of English from a colonially determined, subordinated and parasitic existence. In the process, we might learn a thing or two about 'Indian Literature' as well. -- In Theory: Classes, Nations, Literatures (London & New York: Verso, 1992), p. 283.