PREFACE

Criticism has tended to locate contemporary Indian English poetry in an urban milieu, generally divorced from its link with the regional roots. This is a lop-sided view. My endeavour is to establish that various cultural aspects of a region do form a kind of basis for a number of poems written in English by Indian poets. Personally, I will be comfortable to peruse the cultural negotiations of Kerala in these poems, myself being a Keralite. The treatment of many cultural motifs in these poems in English seems to be strikingly different from what obtains in Malayalam poetry. An exploration in this direction is bound to be of relevance as an integral part of cultural studies that has recently developed new perspectives and methodologies.

Kerala writers in English have played a major role in getting Indian English literature internationally recognized. The writings of Kamala Das and Arundhati Roy alone would bear ample testimony to this. But, while the fictional works of Arundhati Roy, Anita Nair, Jaishree Misra, Sasi Tharoor, Aubrey Menon and Menon Marath have received some critical attention, Kerala poetry in English is yet to receive its due. Except for some book reviews and a handful of books on Kamala Das, no major study in this field has so far been attempted. In that sense, this is a virgin territory that remains unexplored. The present study is an endeavour to make a selective study of
Kerala poets writing in English with the focus on the way the cultural realities of Kerala have been imaged in an alien/colonial language.

The study is not envisaged as a literature for literature sake study, but as an integral part of cultural studies and semiotics. The introductory chapter is a discussion on various issues involved in the use of English language in postcolonial societies for creative purposes, with special reference to the Indian context. The second chapter will roughly map the cultural history of Kerala, highlighting the major events that have affected the Kerala society. An exploration of Kamala Das’s English poems as part of a study of the Kerala images is the focal point of the third chapter. The fourth chapter, as its title indicates, would analyze how Kerala is portrayed in the poems of Meena Alexander. The English poems of E. V. Ramakrishnan, Anita Nair and C. P. Surendran are discussed in detail in the light of their regional dimensions in the penultimate chapter. The last chapter of the project is a summing up of my general observations on English writing in India and on the delineation of Kerala images in the English poems of various poets hailing from Kerala.

The study hopes to have a bearing upon culture, ideology and new aesthetics that might be evolving in the post-colonial scenario.