CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

From the stage of infancy to maturation, the journey of Indian English Poetry chronicles the evolutionary struggle it went through in the past ages. Poetry in India has evolved from a very rich and resourceful ancestry. The poetic instinct was inherent in the Indians since the times immemorial. The Vedas, Upanishads and Puranas, all are marked by a great poetic touch in them. The ancestors were great poets and their genius gradually flowed in the generations that followed them. Being rich in Sanskrit, Pali, Hindi and other regional languages, Indian poetry, initially, found its feet slippery yet manageable when soil of English was offered as a medium. This happened when the Britishers offered English as a mode of communication, both verbal and written. Naik observes that “the British connection with India was effectively established in the beginning of the seventeenth century . . .” (7). However, a group of intellectuals, then, who were at ease in adopting English as a convenient medium of expression for their creative genius sang of their delights and sorrows, feelings of patriotism and nationalism, love and loss, and physical and spiritual fears. In this connection Sri Aurobindo points out that the Indian renaissance was “the attempt of a reawakened national spirit to find a new impulse of self expression which shall give the spiritual force for a great reshaping and rebuilding” (397).

When certain Englishmen were attempting to rediscover India’s glorious past, the gradual spread of English education and Western ideas brought forth a group of earnest Indians who were greatly influenced by their Western counterparts and European learning. By the turn of the century, however, two prominent reasons stimulated the spread of English in India. First, there was a pressing need for Indian clerks, translators and other such officials in administration and knowledge of English was essential for these jobs. On the other hand, some Englishmen were bent on spreading the Christian doctrines among the natives. Even before the close of the eighteenth century, missionary schools emerged in the Southern part of India with a
very fast pace which taught English beside the vernacular. In addition to it, Rajeev S. Patkerighty points out that, “chief among the temptations of embracing English was the range and scope of the language” (276). All these efforts ultimately prepared way for the writers who, having been exposed to the Western language and standards, provided a new dimension to the literature known as Indian English literature.

Poetry being the oldest and richest means of man’s creative expression bore its first fruits in the hands of Henry Derozio (1809-31), the first acknowledged principal figure of Indian English poetic tradition. His poems, especially the longer ones, vigorously sing of nation, soil and its glorious past. In this context M.K. Naik states:

Perhaps the most interesting feature of Derozio’s verse is its burning patriotic zeal, somewhat surprising in a Eurasian at a time when the average representative of his class normally tended to repudiate his Indian blood, and identify himself with the white man, for eminently practical reasons. (Indian English Poetry 10)

Indian myths and legends, too, find its first authentic mention in Derozio’s poetry. Poems like “Chandra’s Beams,” “Highest Himalay,” and “Ganga’s Roll,” distinctly manifest his zeal and skilful handling of theme and subject. His shorter poetic pieces, however, echo mostly the British romantics.

Another poet of somewhat equal stature who came up after Derozio and produced the book The Shair or Minstrel and Other Poems (1830) was Kashiprasad Ghose. He was an author of pure Indian blood. Being less original and more an imitator, Ghose’s poetry was modelled on the Romantic and Neo-classical poets. M.K. Naik opines:

Kashiprasad Ghose seems to intimate by turns the stylized love-lyrics of the Cavalier poets, the moralizing note in neo-classical poetry and the British romantics, his ‘Shair’ being obviously Scott’s ‘minstrel’ in an Indian garb, slightly dishevelled as a result of the arduous voyage across the seas. (A History 24)
But Ghose, apart from these influences, has his little yet peculiar contribution in the sense that he presented the Indian scene replete with Indian customs and rituals, and thus paved way for the generation to come in rendering Indian English poetry open to a more mature phase.

A new note of distinguishable merit was struck by Michael Madhusudan Dutt (1824-73) who, however, being a Bengali started his career as an Indian English poet. His received acknowledgement by his two long narrative poems namely *The Captive Ladie* and *Visions of the Past*. Both came in the same year, 1849. His mastery over the use of octosyllabics is based on the romantic models that he followed, namely Scott and Byron. Dutt has written the latter poem in Miltonic blank verse and simultaneously handles the Christian theme of the temptation and fall and redemption of Man. Thus Dutt, too, remained confined merely to imitate the British models without injecting much from his original domain. M.K. Naik avers, “In spite of his command of English and his sense of rhythm, Dutt’s English poetry hardly rises above the level of derivative, if technically accomplished, verse” (*A History* 25).

As British literature had to adopt new modes of writing after suffering through the havoc of World War I, similarly a new wave of change swept over the Indian subcontinent after the mutiny of 1857. There is a remarkable and perceptible difference between the poetry written before and after the first freedom struggle of 1857. It made the writers more conscious and sensitive toward the situations and experiences of their own countrymen. Now they were in a constant search to attain an authentic artistic utterance to voice the general attitude of anti-establishment. It heralded a new dawn, as Percival Spear writes:

> There was born from the middle stratum of society a new integrated all-India class with varied background but a common foreground of knowledge, ideas and values... It was a dynamic minority. It had a sense of unity, of purpose, and of hope. It was the newborn soul of modern India. In time it was to infuse the whole of India with its spirit. (291)

This spirit soon began to express itself through movements of religious, social and political reform. The period 1857 to 1920 witnessed the inception of various
remarkable institutions which led India and its citizens on the path of enlightenment. The establishment of Brahmo Samaj as early as 1828, attributed to Raja Rammohan Roy, was done with the aim to uplift the masses from the slumber of ignorance by educating them about their rights and status. A similar movement, then, was followed by the establishment of Arya Samaj in 1857 by Swami Dayanand Saraswati. “This was an attempt to revive Hinduism in the pristine purity of the Vedic age. Repudiation of puritanism and polytheism, rejection of the hereditary caste system and revival of proselytization were its chief doctrines” (Naïk, A History 31). Based on ancient Hindu religious and philosophical thought, there also emerged another similar movement known as Theosophical Society founded in New York. It was a blend of the teachings of Hinduism, Buddhism, Pythagoras and Plato, ancient Egyptian thought and early Christianity. On the other hand, among these whirling movements principally devoted to religious reforms emerged Ramakrishna Mission named after Swami Ramakrishna (1836-86) and led under the dynamic leadership of Swami Vivekananda. It instilled a new sense of confidence in the countrymen.

Thus the organized efforts of these institutions brought about a new awakening and consequently writers began to assert a new note of reformist zeal and national spirit. This reformist zeal was inevitably accompanied by a political awakening as well. The impact of World War I and its aftermaths resulted in showcasing the reality that as Europe was seen to be no longer invincible, Britain was realized to be less powerful in the European system than had previously been thought. India started conceiving itself as a distinct political entity which was to be released from the British domination. This increasing self-confidence generated by the re-discovery of the Indian identity received a further boost from the revolutionary movements in China and Turkey in the first decade of the twentieth century. In this connection Percival Spear observes:

All suggested that the path of progress consisted in using western techniques and ideas to regenerate ancient societies and then to use western weapons against western supremacy. The belief in an irresistible West from which
nothing but pure imitation could procure even a modicum of self-respect was broken. India and the East might look forward to independent life again. (319)

These were the socio-political reasons which proved handy in procuring an independent and original place for Indian English literature, and its stupendous effects can be witnessed in the domain of poetry.

It was the poet Toru Dutt (1856-77) who brought Indian English poetry in its true spirit and composed poems of far excellence. The tragedy of her life was that she died just when her talent was maturing with her discovery of her roots. She is considered to be the ‘real’ Indian poet who made the extensive use of Indian myths and legend. What is most impressive about Toru Dutt’s poetry is its virtually total freedom from imitation. She has her own ways to develop the skilful handling of theme and expression in her poetry. “Her best work has the qualities of a quiet strength, of deep emotion held under artistic restraint and an acute awareness of the abiding values of Indian life” (Naik, A History 41). The same path was followed by Toru Dutt’s cousin Romesh Chander Dutt (1848-1909) who wrote both in Bengali and English. He is well known for his translations of the Sanskrit texts namely Lays of Ancient India, The Rigveda, Upnishads. His translations of the Mahabharata (1895) and Ramayana (1899) are better known. “Dutt’s only achievement is that he made the ancient Hindu epics easily accessible to the English reader of the day in chaste Victorian idiom” (Naik, Indian English Poetry 13).

Another poetic figure, contemporary of R.C. Dutt, was Manmohan Ghose whose poetry was English in spirit and Indian in character. Educated from a convent school and fascinated by the life in England, he could not evolve himself up to a true Indian poetic genius. Manmohan Ghose’s poems in Primavera (1890) representative of the colourful aestheticism of the Eighteen Nineties, and his Love Songs and Elegies (1898) celebrating the nature, show the poet still lost in the fin de siècle world. M.K. Naik estimates:

Manmohan Ghose’s poetry reveals a genuine, though limited poetic talent, which unfortunately never developed fully. Hovering all his life between the two worlds of the England of Eighteen Nineties and India, – the one dead and
the other ‘powerless to be born’, as far as he was concerned, Ghose failed to grow as a poet. Unable to strike firm roots in his own native tradition and culture, he could never progress from imitation to authenticity. (Indian English Poetry 15)

All that Manmohan Ghose missed was discovered and celebrated by the poet who acquired a considerable repute in his lifetime namely Sri Aurobindo Ghose (1872-1950). He started in the footsteps of his elders but soon found his own soil to produce remarkable works of lyrical, narrative, philosophical and epic scale. The note of excellence, however, was struck by the appearance of Aurobindo’s Savitri (1950-51), an ambitious epic consisting of 23813 lines in twelve books and forty-nine cantos. Sri Aurobindo himself described the poem as ‘a poetic philosophy of the spirit and of life’. Both the main aim and the poetic strategy of Savitri are indicated in the sub-title: ‘A Legend and a Symbol’. The ancient legend of the devoted wife has been made a vehicle of Sri Aurobindo’s own philosophy of life – Man’s realization of the ‘life Divine’ on this earth. This outline of the work indicates that Savitri is not just another imitative and stale writing in the Western epic mode; it is an utterly unconventional, highly original and deeply philosophical Hindu epic. It is clearly an epic with a difference – a bold experiment in the epic genre. Unlike the traditional epic, it has very little action in it and most of what happens in it takes place on the symbolic plane in the regions of inner reality. Moreover, in the area of diction too Savitri is an equally bold departure from established poetic practice. Therefore, in the hands of Sri Aurobindo, poetry gained new grounds to prosper and sing of man in relation to himself and the universe, and thus provided the next generation an ultimate model to be looked at for inspiration.

Indian English poetry further received embellishment by the consistent and sincere efforts of Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941). Poet, dramatist, novelist, short story writer, composer, painter, thinker, and educationist—he was all rolled up into one. He wrote in Bengali and creatively translated some of his works into English with such remarkable success that his very first effort won him the Nobel Prize for literature. He achieved the peak of fame by translating his poetry collection Gitanjali
(1912) into English which won him the Nobel Prize. He was perhaps the first Indian English poet who instead of merely being the follower of his contemporary British poets, in fact inspired them by virtue of his poetic talent. W.B. Yeats and Ezra Pound, for instance, were his fervent admirers. Tagore’s verse in English is essentially lyrical in quality. His subjects are the elemental subjects of all lyrical poetry – God, Nature, Love, the Child, Life and Death, and he brings to his treatment of these subjects the born lyric poet’s simplicity, sensuousness and passion. His is a poetry steeped in the Indian ethos, because he sings with the ancient wisdom of *Upanishads* in his bones. As Jawaharlal Nehru puts it:

> He was in line with the *rishis*, the great sages of India, drawing from the wisdom of the ancient past and giving it a practical garb and meaning in the present. Thus, he gave India’s own message in a new language in keeping with the *yugadharma*, the spirit of the times. (XVI)

Thus, Tagore is, of course, a much unparalleled poet. At his best, Tagore remains a poet with a delicate sensibility deeply Indian in spirit. He is certainly an eminent literary figure for the following generation to look forward to.

Another significant Indian poet who achieved success in greater measure in England was Sarojini Naidu (1879-1949). The poetic gift came to her at a very tender age and she started composing poetry. Later in England, under the influence of Rhymers’ Club, her poetic talent developed into a mature craftsmanship. Her volumes of poetry namely *The Golden Threshold* (1905), *The Bird of Time* (1912) and *The Broken Wing* (1917) show her journey through her familiar and unfamiliar provinces. By this time the social reforms and freedom struggle had reached the crescendo and Naidu felt compelled from her inner self to be engaged in nation’s social and political movements. However, her lyrical gift seems to be inherent and nature-given; yet it is strongly influenced both by British Romanticism and Urdu and Persian poetic modes. There are also some remarkable poems celebrating Indian myths, legends and history, which reveal her deep-rooted sense of Indianness, religious sympathy and her secular outlook. Additionally, love and nature also form an important part in her poetic world where she paints a prism of love as emotion and one of nature’s best gifts.
Thus, in the chaos of imitation and derivativeness, the work of these three poets stands out by virtue of their individuality and authenticity. Sri Aurobindo with his symbolic richness, Rabindranath Tagore with his devotional fervour and Sarojini Naidu with her ecstatic celebration of Love and Nature show their firm rootedness in Indian tradition and culture and in this way, head Indian English poetry towards a more mature and splendid phase.

The younger poets exposed to the poetic gifts and metrical achievements of Sri Aurobindo and Rabindranath Tagore are mainly drawn into two distinctive streams—practitioners of religious, mystical, philosophical and reflective verse, and poets writing chiefly in the Romantic-Victorian tradition. However, the poetry of this period is, by and large, sentimental, effusive and mainly uninfluenced by Eliot and Pound’s modernist revolution. It is not truly patriotic either and continues to follow the decadent Victorian and Romantic legacies.

The Post Independence poetry in India rejected the Romantic-Victorian tradition and was more influenced by poets like Eliot, Pound, and others. The nature of images and symbols changed from the ethereal to the hard and concrete, and instead of a countryside tradition of poetry, emerged a poetry of urban landscape depicting an urban sensibility and dealing with the problems of an emerging city culture. The Romantic tradition, however, could be still said to exist as Aurobindo’s *Savitri* was published in 1950-51 and his *Last Poems* (1952) and *More Poems* in 1953. Rajeev S. Patke makes a remarkable observation:

> While most sustained a sanguine hope of an inert continuity with this tradition, some chose to initiate a new beginning: the latter provide more interesting material, even if the new beginnings represent no more than a shift in allegiance from post-Romantic to modern inclinations. (275)


Modern Indian poetry in English actually began with the establishment of the Writers Workshop at Calcutta in 1958. Started by P. Lal, the Writers Workshop
manifesto said that the new school of poetry consisted of a group of writers who agreed in principle that English has proved its ability, as a language, to play a creative role in Indian literature through original writings and transcreation. The first modern anthology of Indian English Poetry was Modern Indo-Anglian Poetry edited by P. Lal and K. Raghvendra Rao in 1958. Concreteness of experience was emphasized with an urge to experiment particularly in the language of common speech.

Nissim Ezekiel is the most notable figure of this school. He published A Time to Change (1952), Sixty Poems (1953), The Third (1959), The Unfinished Man (1960), The Exact Name (1965) and Hymns in Darkness (1976). Ezekiel presents an urban scene in his poetry with occasional use of the elements of myth. Ezekiel learnt his craft from Eliot and Auden though he also felt inspired by Rilke. Alienation and the sense of being uprooted from the core of many of Ezekiel’s poems. Rajeev S. Patke opines that, Ezekiel’s poems in Indian English show him venturing successfully into modes no longer preoccupied with the self, in which he can empathise better with the unsympathetic aspects of his linguistic and cultural milieu. However, failure in love and marriage and art are other themes of Ezekiel’s poetry. He has mastery over colloquial speech, rhyme and rhythm, though occasionally, he drifts into loose patterns, particularly in his minor verse.

Dom Moraes was another ‘new’ poet to emerge during the fifties. Much of his time he spent in England, winning the Hawthornden Prize in 1958, and becoming a British citizen in 1961. He published his first collection A Beginning in 1957, Poems in 1960 and John Nobody in 1968. Dom’s is a confessional poetry, surrealistic, influenced by the poetry of Dylan Thomas. There are insecurities working up in Dom’s poetry owing to traumatic experiences he had in his childhood because of the insanity of his mother. His autobiography, My Son’s Father, reveals it. Eroticism and self-probing are frequent recourses in his poetry. Classical, medieval myths are shaped in terms of good and evil forces symbolized by the dragon and the dwarfs, Cain and the Unicorn, and so on.

The 1960s also saw the emergence of new poets, the earliest being P. Lal. He published The Parrot’s Death and Other Poems (1967), Yakshi from Didarganj and
Other Poems (1969), The Man of Dharma and the Rasa of Silence (1974) and Calcutta: A Long Poem (1977). His Collected Poems also appeared in 1977. He has also published the translated versions of the Bhagavadgita (1965), The Dhammapada (1967) and Ghalib’s Love Poems (1971). He has also made a verse translation of The Mahabharata of which several slender volumes have appeared. Lal believes in the melodic pattern which is all important for him. His contribution in popularising Indian English poetry is substantial.


Apart from Adil Jussawalla, A.K. Ramanujan was the most authentic signatures to emerge during the sixties. He published The Striders (1966) which won him the Poetry Book Society Award. Relations was published in 1971. His translations from Kannada and Tamil poetry into English are included in The Interior Landscape (1967) and Speaking of Siva (1972). Ramanujan draws his themes from anthropology, linguistics, folklore, religion, myth, and uses myth, metre, and logical structure to shape his experience. Irony, paradox and satire are well used even in poems which talk of the Hindu ethos. Romantic cliché are foreign to his poetry.

R. Parthasarthy is a fellow poet writing in English with his mother tongue being Tamil. Beginning his poetic career with a great faith in English, Parthasarthy’s stay in England belied all hopes and he returned to India with new orientations and understanding. He later declared his intention of writing only in Tamil. However, Rough Passage (1977) is Parthasarthy’s only collection in English written between 1961 and 1975. The poem is in three parts dealing with the theme of an identity exposed to two cultures simultaneously. Rough Passage has not been able to be a national odyssey, and at best, it remains a personal testament having evocative passages contrived well in a foreign tongue.

them with clinical detachment, which cannot, however, completely obliterate his human sympathies” (Naik, A History 204). Patel writes poetry of situations. Beginning with a real life situation, Patel hardly uses any metaphor or symbol and relies heavily on irony and direct detail. His descriptions remain bare and naked. Here Rajeev S. Patke points out that, “his steady-eyed appraisal confronts the disorienting aspects of experience on a middle ground between evasion and involvement” (296). Thus, his poems are generally lean of shape, and spare of movement and gesture. They are, instead, characterized by quick, unexpected figurative turns, and complex attitudes.

From the poets who began writing in 1960s and made their presence felt on the poetic firmament, the one who made the deepest impression is Kamala Das (1934-2009). Kamala Das made her fiery entry into this realm through the ‘confessional’ mode. She has often been compared to the American poets Sylvia Plath and Anne Saxton in having raised a voice of a highly sexually explosive kind of writing which has lent an air of freshness to women’s poetry in India. “Her poetry spoke with fierce and unsparing honesty about the difficulties of being a woman and a wife in a time and for a culture which had trained women to a long tradition of silence” (Patke 283). A distinguished author in her mother tongue, Malayalam, Kamala Das has published three books of verse in English: Summer in Calcutta (1965), The Descendants (1967) and The Old Playhouse and Other Poems (1973). The total impression her poetry produces is one of a bold, ruthless honesty tearing passionately at conventional attitudes to reveal the quintessential woman within.

Nissim Ezekiel has been acclaimed as one of the leading Indo-Anglian poets today. His poetry has been subjected to multiple interpretations. However a vast range of critical acumen has been invested on the themes of contemporary Indian life and the urban milieu, alienation, search for self, personal integration, cross-cultural encounters, a search for spiritual values and a quest for identity incorporated firmly in his poetry. Therefore, as far as the critical material on his poetry is concerned, a number of trends immediately become perceptible to the reader.
Ezekiel is a painstaking craftsman who gives utmost attention to the right use of words and metaphors. This aspect has attracted attention of critics like Anisur Rehman, Shirish Chindhade, Christopher Wiseman, D. Ramakrishna, and Syed Md. Rafique Azam. Some of them have brought out full length studies on the poet. Anisur Rehman in his book focuses on form and value, images and symbols, and language and diction. He asserts, “Ezekiel’s quest is for the primal roots – a sense of form in life as well as in poetry which manifests life in all its fullness” (84).

Shirish Chindhade in his article “Bathos as a Strategy in Nissim Ezekiel’s ‘Very Indian Poems in Indian English’ ” makes an apparent statement that Ezekiel certainly want to seriously achieve in these poems “something more than mere debunking, persiflage, satire, irony and the humour arising out of all this chemistry. There is no acrimony, no prejudice, no stand-offish superiority. Contrary, there is throbbing sympathy, understanding and, at times, pathos that adds a clean redemptive touch to the irony, satire and humour” (141).

Another critic, D. Ramakrishna, in his essay “Ezekiel’s Credo” compares Ezekiel to Eliot and concludes that “Ezekiel is opposed to incoherence and confused thinking in literature and art” (65). Ramakrishna’s essay is based on the hypothesis that “Ezekiel’s Credo is based on sound convictions in respect of both the extrinsic and intrinsic aspects of literature” (66).

On the other hand, Christopher Wiseman talks about the technique in his essay “The Development of Technique in the Poetry of Nissim Ezekiel” with special reference to The Exact Name commenting on the prosodic features, Wiseman states: “Suddenly and confidently, an impressive strength and individuality displays itself in the final section, undamaged by any extraneous remnants of formal prosody, and the result is a poem of great strength and interest, acid in its satire and spontaneous and natural in its sound” (68).

Whereas, Syed Md. Rafique Azam concentrates on the kind of language and its peculiarity used by Ezekiel. He in his essay “The Language of Nissim Ezekiel” remarks that though Ezekiel shows his close affinity with his contemporaries in sharing the poignant themes of the contemporary Indian scene, yet he differs from
them in his art of touching expression. Azam comments, “Without experimenting too much in ideas and language but following those generally accepted he achieved his goal by bringing forth a frank and fortnight, fresh and informed, easy and conversational, authentic and artistic expression of a modern sensibility in an evocative modern idiom” (173).

The theme of alienation has been given due attention by critics like M.K. Naik and K. Raghavendra Rao. Naik in his essay “Nissim Ezekiel and Alienation” affirms that “the poet reacts to the alienation experience and tries to put it to artistic use” (48). But he concludes the essay with the observation:

“It is thus difficult to maintain that Ezekiel succeeded fully in transmuting his alienation experience into major poetic utterance, except occasionally; though he certainly offers many interesting variations on the theme. But by and large, his is a poetry which seems to prefer to dwell on the periphery of the alienation experience without attempting to reach its hard central core. (52-53)

K. Raghavendra Rao, however, in his article first defines alienation, “By alienation, I imply a condition for a being in which that being is separated from that without which that being cannot remain wholly itself ” (99). In his view, modern man becomes alienated because he has lost his religious anchors. Comparing Ezekiel to others poets of the time, Rao remarks, “While the poetry of writers like Ramanujan or Parthasarathy or Kamala Das plays the alienation games as games, Nissim Ezekiel plays them as games of life and death” (107).

Zerin Anklesaria studies the use of wit in the essay entitled “Wit in the poetry of Nissim Ezekiel”. Anklesaria feels that there is a fusion of the witty and the lyrical in Ezekiel’s poetry. Observing the influence of Auden and Eliot in the sphere of wit in the works of Ezekiel, Anklesaria comments, “A single line is, in most cases, a self-contained unit, and the clipped regularity of rhyme and verse pattern concentrates the meaning and holds it firmly within the poem” (75). Anklesaria considers Ezekiel’s poems most significant and extended exercises in wit.
One of Ezekiel’s major concerns is the construction of self. N. Mohanty, Suresh Chandra Dwivedi, S. N. Prasad, Manju Roy and Satyanarain Singh have taken up the issue of self in their respective works. Mohanty highlights that “Ezekiel’s poetry evolves out of an attempt to define and redefine the differences between the real Indian and the unreal Indian” (78). He concludes the essay observing that Ezekiel’s later poetry appears to voice forth “the basic paradox of Ezekiel’s self and consciousness that he is a Jew in the Hindu dominated society and that he has accepted both the Jewish and Hindu philosophical attributes” (96). Suresh Chandra Dwivedi has also marked the same element in his essay “‘To Become a Form and Find My Relevance’: Progress of the Self in Ezekiel’s Poetry.” His study is based on the idea that “for Ezekiel form is of permanent importance and poetry matters to him because it can provide him with a sense of progress of self and a sense of relevance in a meaningless world” (174). In his view, Ezekiel pursues his quest of life and art at one and the same time. In addition to this, S.N. Prasad in his essay “The Cognitive Self in Nissim Ezekiel: An Approach to his Poetry” adds that “the poetic self in Ezekiel has undergone a sort of consecration at cognitive level” (125). Manju Roy places Ezekiel between tradition and modernity, between romanticism and imagism in her article “From Self-Laceration to Self-Realization: A Study of Nissim Ezekiel’s Poetry”. She observes that, “Ezekiel harnessed his poetic gifts to analyze his own dilemmas both as a person as well as poet” (156). Satyanarain Singh in “Journey into Self: Nissim Ezekiel’s Recent Poetry” remarks that “a victim of impulses and indecision, the poet’s worst oppressor is his own self and yet this oppressing self is also the source of his poetry” (53).

An attempt to study the use of imagery has been made by critics like A.N. Dwivedi. In his essay “Imagery in Nissim Ezekiel’s Later Poetry” Dwivedi states, “He rather uses imagery sparingly and judiciously. As a result, his images remain strictly functional rather than decorative. Some images in his poetry are repeatedly used, and they acquire symbolic overtones” (117).

Ezekiel’s poetry has also been interpreted from humanistic standpoint. Critics in this category are Rajiv K. Mallik and P.R. Kher who search out the humanistic
touch in Ezekiel’s poetry. Mallik’s essay entitled “Nissim Ezekiel and His Humanism” presents an emphatic statement that “Ezekiel’s poetry emphasize the centrality of man in the universe” (185). Mallik observes in the course of his paper, “Right from the beginning of his poetic career, we discover this humanized stance of the poet. He intended to make poetry an instrument that can bring in good and happiness to the humanity at large” (189). On the other hand, Kher talks about the neo-humanism in relation to Ezekiel’s poetry. He states that “It is this kind of neo-humanism that we find in Nissim Ezekiel’s poetry, not the traditional, idealistic humanism that we find in Renaissance literature. Ezekiel’s concern with man’s predicament is purely in realistic and concrete terms” (153). Probing the more distinct qualities of Ezekiel’s humanism, Kher points out, “Ezekiel’s moral sense is neither dogmatic nor even conventional. His moral sense is basically grounded on humane feeling” (154).

The note of modernity is highlighted in Ezekiel’s poetry by A.N. Dwivedi. He emphatically asserts, “The austerity of his art, the economical accuracy of his language, the condensation of his style, the impressiveness of his imagery, the sharpness of his wit and irony, the contemporaneity of his subject-matter: all these immediately render him a ‘modern’ poet of great relevance and significance” (107-108). According to Dwivedi, the modernity of Ezekiel’s poetry is found in his skilful execution of wit and irony; he usually juxtaposes contrasts and contradictions in his poetry.

Search for identity has also remained one of the recurrent themes in Ezekiel’s poetry. This has been analyzed by critics like G. Damodhar. In his essay “Search for Identity: An Estimate of Ezekiel’s Poetry” Damodhar comments, “Ezekiel’s groping for identity at times appears to reflect an East-West dichotomy. But at a deeper level, he is pitted against his environment” (81). He also points out existential strain in Ezekiel’s poetry stating that “Ezekiel is primarily a poet seeking a balance between an almost existential involvement with life and an intellectual quest” (80). Another critic, P.K. Kher, too highlights the existentialist dilemma in his article “Existential Strain in Nissim Ezekiel’s Poetry” observing that “it is quite clear that, though he, at times,
ridicules and mocks the traditional theistic order and the values of life, Ezekiel quite earnestly and seriously wants to comprehend the meaning of life that may be unravelled with the help from God” (8).

Other critics find in Ezekiel’s poetry the religious-philosophic strain. Vasant Sahane explores this aspect of spiritual quest in his article “The Religious-Philosophical strain in Nissim Ezekiel’s Poetry”. He finds that Ezekiel “becomes conscious of his own mask in the process of realizing his own self as a condition precedent to understanding the nature of Divinity” (24). On the other hand, Michael Garman examines the spiritual outlook of Ezekiel in his critical piece “Nissim Ezekiel – Pilgrimage and Myth”. He finds that “He is a poet of whom it is not trivial to say that his poetry and his life are inextricable, and whose purpose in writing is to make a harmony out of a purely biological fact” (36).

Ezekiel is deeply rooted in the Indian soil. In him one discerns a certainty of touch that seems to reflect a confidence in the direction and purpose of his writing as well as integrity of images of India, style and subject-matter. Vinoda and Shiv Kumar observe that “Ezekiel’s Indian English poems are remarkable in so far as they focus on those Indian modes of social behaviour which will assort with those of English, reflecting thereby a typical post-colonial cross-cultural situation” (78). R.N. Mishra captures the Indian scene apparently reflected in Ezekiel’s poetry in his article “Indian Colour in Nissim Ezekiel”. He clearly mentions that “In his poems Nissim Ezekiel has done a tremendous job in pointing focus on various Indian settings. In many of his poems we come across a vigilant criticism of Indian situation” (150). However, C. Anna Latha Devi in her article “Vignettes of Indian Life: An Analysis of the Selected Poems of Nissim Ezekiel” writes that “His exposure of all sides of Indian reality is with frankness, detachment and objectivity. Committed to India, especially to Bombay, the city of his birth, Ezekiel seeks his identity in the Indian soil and he is proud of the Indian environment in which he is a segment” (139). Bruce King’s appreciation of modern elements in Ezekiel’s poetry is evident when he observes that “such modernistic characteristics as irony, heightened critical self-consciousness, strong intellectual purpose...a multiplicity of tones, the artistic distancing of emotions
through a persona were among his contributions to Indian poetry” (Modern Indian Poetry 92). Discussing Ezekiel’s themes, King in Three Indian Poets observes:

Renewal, desire, interest, women, poetry, prayer, wholeness, righteousness, calm—these were to remain among Ezekiel’s concerns over the years although the specific framework or philosophy of life would alter to allow for fragmentation and the impossibility of bringing all the pieces of one’s self into harmony Ezekiel recapitulates the experience of the modern intellectual who is emancipated from tradition by the optimistic rationality of the Enlightenment, but who lives during a time of rapidly increasing fragmentation when rationality has come to mean accepting discontinuity, relativity, the truth of conflicting observations, and the logic of the rational (35).

Some of the critics have probed Ezekiel’s biographical antecedents and have tried to locate the source and inspiration of his poetry there. R. Raj Rao has written the book entitled Nissim Ezekiel: The Authoritative Biography in which he has attempted to connect the poet to his poetry in biographical knots.

There exist several full length studies also of the poet. Sanjit Mishra’s book The Poetic Art of Nissim Ezekiel is an attempt to assess the romantic, realistic and humanist phase of poet’s writing career. Tracing his Jewish background, Mishra stresses that “the instinctive awareness of marginality is primarily responsible for the recurring notes of anguish and anxiety in Ezekiel’s poetry which records his incessant struggle to transcend his position and force himself onto the centre” (151). A. Raghu has carried out a thematic and stylistic study entitled The Poetry of Nissim Ezekiel. This book not only incorporates all his seven collections, from A Time to Change to Latter-Day Psalms, chronologically but also includes most of his uncollected poetry. Raghu states that the aim of this study is “to relate the poetry of Ezekiel to that of his predecessors and his contemporaries” (9).

B.K. Das encapsulates the whole journey of Ezekiel’s poetic career in his book The Horizon of Nissim Ezekiel. Counting on the attainment of Ezekiel, Das also examines the kind of techniques that Ezekiel has exploited in adding graces to his poems. Das comments, “Ezekiel incorporates the heat and dust, the sun and floods,
the sense of poverty and deprivation into the texture of his verse” (17). The study also chronicles the process of the creation of Indian English idiom in the hands of Ezekiel.

Chetan Karnani in his full-length study *Nissim Ezekiel* emphasises the physical aspects of his poetry and finds that “bone, marrow, blood and flesh” (34) occur too frequently but the critic fails to appreciate the fact that his obsession with sexuality resulted in flash with his Jewish consciousness which provided him poetic substance to write poetry. Dwivedi evaluates imagery and poetical forms in Ramanujan’s poems by employing new critical tools. M. K. Naik in his article, “A. K. Ramanujan and the Search for Roots” appreciates Ramanujan’s sense of questioning the past and hopes the poet to “some day reach the very tap root of his heritage” though he fails to appreciate the utility of multiplicity of pasts for Ramanujan because Naik seems to have taken the heritage only in pure Sanskrit tradition. S. K. Desai in his article “Mixing Memory with Desire: Small Scale Reflections on the Poetry of A. K. Ramanujan” offers a perceptive reading of several poems from *The Striders* and *Relations*. He concludes that “Ramanujan is essentially a modernist committed to an antihistorical, depoliticized, transnational consciousness and to stylistic experimentalism, like, say Imagism and Expressionism. This perspective of modernism will provide a clear understanding of Ramanujan’s poetry in English than we have had so far. For instance, we will realize that his Indian memory is but a peg to hang his modernism on and not his central concern” (112-13). Nissim Ezekiel in his review of *Relations* emphasized the use of irony and sarcasm as vehicle of social protest and also notices the impact of Tamil and Kannada poems. Ezekiel says, “Some of his special virtues flow from these [Tamil and Kannada] cultural sources” (*Selected Prose* 148). Satyanarain Singh in his article “Ramanujan and Ezekiel” takes a similar stance. He writes, “Ramanujan’s poetry is image-oriented. His genius looks for the particular, precise and the concrete as against the general, the vague and abstract...in Ramanujan’s poetry imagery appears to determine and control theme” (165). Rama Nair’s focus in “*Of Variegated Hues*”: The Poetry and Translations of A. K. Ramanujan is more on translations besides the study of relationship between his poetry and translations though not rigorously worked out. The study tends to create an impression as if his poetry was a part time affair of a full time translator. Bruce
King’s close study is an effort to read Ramanujan’s poetry in relation to the contemporary Euro-American practices of expressionism, imagism and surrealism. Its relation to the Indian poetical tradition is almost completely absent in *Three Indian Poets*. Rajeev S. Patke tends to differ with Bruce King a bit when he focuses his attention on the relationship between Ramanujan’s poetry in English and his translation of native texts in terms of Ramanujan being a diasporic poet. Jahan Ramazani in *The Hybrid Muse: Postcolonial Poetry in English* avers that Ramanujan negotiates spatio-temporal differences between the East and the West, the ancient and the modern and the native and the alien through “the postcoloniality of metaphor and the metaphoricity of postcoloniality” (75). Surya Nath Pande’s anthology *Millennium Perspectives on A. K. Ramanujan* contains essays by prominent writers on different aspects of Ramanujan’s poetry but does not show any consistency of critical frame. The Poetry of A.K.Ramanujan, edited by Bhatnagar, is also a loose collection of essays on such aspects of his poetry as theme and form, nature, poetic sensibility and the poetic cosmos. Chindhade’s purpose is to “see whether Ramanujan’s cultural, linguistic and in fact, the comprehensive ‘native’ heritage has really perlocated into his artistic personality, finally getting integrated, into his world of experience and perception” (62). Banerjee in *A. K. Ramanujan’s Poetic Theory and Practice* reads him as “a poet of connections, of continuity; he not only connects his poems with his own preoccupations but moves backwards into the past to Cankam poetry…and again forward to the present, to the works of his contemporary writers, e.g. Adiga, Sharma, Ananthamurthy, Karnad and others (of the *Navya Kavya* school)” (27).

D. Ramakrishna in “Ramanujan’s Credo” foregrounds the continuity between Ramanujan’s poetry, translation and scholarship. He argues that Ramanujan is “an exception as a writer functioning in an alien climate containing both the Eastern and the Western sensibilities within himself … is unique in his ability to contain within himself the binaries, explaining the East to the West and the West to the East with perfect equanimity” (10-11). Bijay Kumar Das’s “A Post-Colonial Reading of A. K. Ramanujan’s Poetry” argues that his poetry conforms to the norm of ‘post-coloniality’ in content as well as form which is suitably substantiated by his multi-cultural perspective. Akshay Kumar reorients the focus “on the cultural dynamics of A. K.
Ramanujan’s poetic discourse in terms of engagement with the constructs of ‘nation’, ‘race’, dharma’ and ‘time’. As a poet intellectually conscious of various cultural frames available to him, Ramanujan re-configures and re-maps the contours of culture and politics in ways that do not easily subscribes to given ideological choices” (6). He further writes “A. K. Ramanujan as an … (Indian) Tamil-American poet, contends with so many inheritances, poets and traditions that no monologic frames of aesthetics can accommodate his heterogeneity of experience” (16). He locates Ramanujan’s poetry in the complexly intersecting and intertwining desi, margi and videshi traditions.

Kamal Preet Kaur has studied Ramanujan’s poetry from postmodernist viewpoint and as a mixture of the “modernism and post-modernism” (19). It is within this matrix of these aspects ranging “from the Indian to the American environment, both cultural and ideological,” that Kaur examines “the dynamics of discord as reflected in the different oppositions with which Ramanujan engages himself and plays upon” (20-21). She focuses on the discord between the East and the West; past and present; self and society and between life and death.

The foregoing critical survey clearly reveals that the critic’s main focus is on thematic aspects in case of both the poets under study though there are some studies on form and technique also. But all these studies have consistently neglected to map the metropolitan sensibility of Ezekiel and Ramanujan which shapes their attitudes to such different aspects as nation, religion and family. Since both of them are metropolitan poets, it becomes all the more important to map the contours of metropolitan sensibility in their poetic universe

Since sensibility is a function of space, therefore the location and geographical coordinates bring about a structure of feelings in the inhabitants of that space. All these years, the considerations of time have engaged the maximum in the form of recognition of history and tradition as all-informing narratives of experience. Space with its material presence somehow has suffered critical neglect for the simple reason that it is difficult to carry the baggage of location in the discourse of analysis. Time can be extrapolated and decentralized but space, firmly anchored in the soil, itself
refuses to be abstracted or all essentialised. It is in this context that differential of relationship is to be established among the residents of the countryside and the citizens of the cityscapes. Metropolitan, as a space, has its recent past and, therefore, the kind of geopiety it evokes among its residents needs to be mapped through literary productions because feelings and sensibilities which constitute the core of geopiety can only be measured and calibrated through discourse of writing.

Metropolitan sensibility is a sensibility of a cosmopolitan being—one who has travelled away from the real—unreal, factual-imaginary, concrete—hypothetical origin of his so-called belonging. It is essentially space of tensions and negotiations in which the secular, the quotidian and the everyday pragmatic engagement of life on the one hand and the nostalgia of the original past on the other, form the central dialectics. The citizen, today, therefore, is destined to be ambivalent in responses as he is critical and possessive, reverential and irreverential, respectful and disrespectful towards both his locations, the present location of his metropolis and the past location which he has abandoned. And being ambivalent is not a position of the hypocrisy or of being in a position of disadvantage. It is a happy and enabling predicament; for the writer, it is an occasion to occupy both the spaces and enjoy the tension that the conflict between the two spaces generates. The modern dweller of the urban landscape carefully maintains a relationship of love and hate towards his affiliated present and a filiative past. It needs to be reiterated that metropolis is not just about affiliations or working relationships or business transactions; it is also about pressing nostalgia, memories and emotional atavism that lurk in the unconscious of the displaced self. The institution of family, for instance, undergoes transformation in this kind of newly forged space while it becomes increasingly nuclear. It brings together rare degrees of intimacy between the first blood relationships. In literature and poetry that emanates from that space, one finds a series of narratives or poems that deal with father-son, daughter-father, and husband-wife relation. But this kind of narrative or poetry is always relative, never absolute. In metropolitan sensibility, we find relative rationality in place of absolute rationality. On the one hand, we find the metropolitan persona always drawn towards the family but on the other, we also find him questioning the family values and relationships.
In modern English poetry, native land is invoked as a “quotidian space” (Fitter 52) illustrating routine activity and typical occupational experience sans any religious and panegyrical motifs. The relation of Indian English poets towards their respective homeland is temporal and, therefore, perhaps intrinsically secular. The emphasis is on the common scenes and daily experience rather than on the mythological and hieratic. Ezekiel’s response to Bombay is his response to his homeland i.e. India. His response to India is quite problematic. Neither does he own Bombay with a nativist’s enthusiasm; nor does he reject Bombay as an alien outsider. Ezekiel’s poems about his homeland are an attempt of a Jew of a Bene-Israel community coming to terms with his adopted homeland. As a “good native,” he seeks adjustment with Bombay as a strategy of survival:

It is home,

which I recognize at last

as a kind hell

to be made tolerable

(“After Reading a Prediction,” CP 155)

The persona in Ezekiel’s poetry accepts Bombay out of compulsions of identity; otherwise it is not a place to seek cultural affinity. “The Indian landscape sears my [his] eyes” (“Background Casually,” CP 80-81) because here he “finds slums, hawkers, pavement dwellers, party going urbanites, hypocritical moral and religious codes and scheming young secretaries exploited by their bosses” (Raghunandan 14). Repeatedly he would express his disenchantment with life in Bombay only to realize in the end that only Bombay can provide him some kind of a cultural anchorage. In one breath, he would declare Bombay “unsuitable for song as well as sense” because it is full of “slums and skyscrapers,” in the next breath realizing the futility of his resentment he would announce, “I am here to find my way in it” (“Island,” CP 182). The metaphor of ‘home’, thus, has been used as a comprehensive metaphor which at a relatively limited level stands for the poet’s individuality, and in a wider context, it stands for his native country India.
In case of Ramanujan, a non-resident Indian poet, the issue of homeland becomes quite problematic. As a naturalized American/Western, Ramanujan’s persona views his native land with critical insight. There is no haunting sense of attachment with his native land in his poems nor is there glorification of its rich cultural heritage or its golden past. Quite the contrary, we find him finding fault with its ossified rituals, mindless obsession with the dead past, ghetto environs where nothing changes. He prays to Lord Murugan to deliver his country from the deathly grip of dead myths, legends and languages:

Deliver us O Presence
from proxies
and absences
from sanskrit and mythologies
of night and several
roundtable mornings
of London and return the future to what
it was

(“Prayers to Lord Murugan,” TCP 117)

In Ramanujan’s poetry we find unsparing critique of native landscape because it is his possessive space and its degeneration that worries him all the more. The persona also castigates it for its immoral politicians, communal violence, poverty, squalor and slums. In Ramanujan’s poems about his homeland, there is constant play between love and hate, attraction and repulsion, intimacy and withdrawal. However, it is not the contempt but the concern of the poet persona that characterises his response towards his native homeland. Despite having chosen Chicago as the ‘affiliative’ home, his “links with his motherland are too strong to be severed” (Ghosh 75). But at the same time, it neither enlivens nor dampens his spirit.

Influenced as they are by the ideals of Western empiricism, both Ezekiel and Ramanujan underplay their religious heritage and ethnicity. In their ‘secular’ verse, the emphasis invariably is on the human, rather than the divine. Nissim Ezekiel’s
poetry subscribes to what is hypothetically believed to be the universal human experience. The Judaic concepts, beliefs and prayers are rationalized and secularised with a discernible intellectual cynicism. In a letter to Prof. Delmer Bogner at New Paltz, New York, Ezekiel admits: “I was brought up in a mildly orthodox Jewish home which gradually became liberal Jewish. I attended the liberal Jewish synagogue in Bombay until I abandoned religion altogether soon after leaving school” (qtd. in Sahane 254).

Ezekiel’s re-reading of the holy psalms in terms of jingles and jokes closely reveals his subversive and sceptic outlook. The use of non-serious, non-sensical, nursery rhymes like ‘Baa-ba black sheep’ in the recreation of psalms is blatantly irreligious. The psalms are parodied in modern humanistic and existential terms:

We are the people of his pa-

sture, we are the sheep

of his hand. Baa Baa Black

Sheep

(“Latter Day Psalms,” CP 258)

Sanjit Mishra finds fault with Ezekiel when he observes that “equating hymns to nonsense verse smacks of an erratic thinking even to a common man” (143). But at the same time he declares that psalms are the part of his flesh:

Now I am through with

the psalms; they are

part of my flesh

(CP 261)

Though he questions God for his inability to save the Nazis from the holocaust, he does not turn away from him: “Did none pray who was ca-/ught in the holocaust?” (CP 256). His views about God are not dogmatic. His God is not stern, authoritative; rather He is one who listens to the wailing humanity:
I worship the God
who regards the prayer of the destitute
who hears the groaning of the
prisoner, and of those who are
appointed to death.

(CP 259)

The poet-persoona with his humanist, liberal and rationalist views universalises His blessings. For him, God’s blessings are not reserved only for the ‘chosen ones’ i.e. the Jews; these are, in fact, for all the people of the Earth because all of them are his concerns: “Thy blessings is upon/all the people of the earth” (CP 254). Though he does not believe in the orthodox religion, he is not agnostic. He does bring down God from His pedestal but does turn to him for his salvation in particular and of humanity in general.

The same kind of subversive and deflationary tone and attitude is very much evident in Ramanujan’s religion-oriented poems. As an orthodox Tamil-Kannada Brahmin imbued with metropolitan sensibility, he does invoke Hindu gods and goddesses but the satirical-cynical intention is too clear to be missed even by a casual reader. His mocking tone verging on irreverence is clearly evidenced in “The Striders” wherein he deflates the supernatural powers of the prophets by comparing them with the tiny bugs which sit on the water surface the way the gods, goddesses or prophets are supposed to do in the display of their miraculous powers:

No, not only prophets
walk on water. This bug
sits on a landslide of lights
and drowns eye-deep
into its tiny strip
of sky
Lord Vishnu is said to have his abode in the ocean, and the ‘irreverent’ comparison could refer to Him. The same note of irreverence and disrespect is visible in “A Devotee’s Complaint,” where he talks of foul temper of Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth and Saraswati, the goddess of learning:

Try to curry favour

with Lakshmi
you lose an eye-tooth
Saraswati, she slaps you hard
and where her fingers touch
your cheek, you’ve no hair
so you’ve to shave close
or bear her four-finger mark
on your face

(“A Devotee’s Complaint,” TCP 237)

He sometimes questions, sometimes turns upside down the established beliefs of Hinduism. Denial of body, supremacy of soul and ahimsa are the cardinal concepts of this religion but the persona in Ramanujan’s poetry subverts the same. Contrary to the concepts of his religion, he believes in the concept of ‘deathless body’. He does not want to leave his body on his onward journey to the next life after birth. He calls it “dear body” and “dear pursuing presence” (“A Hindu to this Body,” TCP 40). He celebrates his body thus:

Gave me fingers to clutch
at grace, at malice, and ruffle
someone else’s hair; to fold a
man’s shadow back on his world;
to hold in the dark of the eye
through a winter and a fear
the poise, the shape of a breast.

The Gita, the most sacred scripture of the Hindus by which they swear, preaches equanimity and poise in the light of the actual life experiences He equates it with indifference:

I do not marvel
When I see good and evil; I just walk
Over the iridescence
Of horsepiss after rain. Knives, bombs, scandal,
And cowdung fall on women in wedding lace:
I say nothing

(“The Hindoo: he reads his Gita and is calm at all events,” TCP 79)

He also demolishes the popular belief that the Hindus are endowed with the “second sight” i.e. spiritual and intuitive knowledge. For him, the physical is more important that the abstract: “I fumble.../and strike a light to regain/at once my first, and only, sight” (“Second Sight,” TCP 191). Ramanjuan’s persona has a hyphenated self caught in opposite pulls of Hinduism and the post-modern metropolitan imperatives of life in Chicago. His acceptance of Hinduism is not the acceptance of a native Hindu.

For the metropolitan persona, family is not a hallowed institution the way it has been touted in the traditional Indian system. Instead of being the primary and central institution of culturalisation, family is a burden, a liability for both Ezekiel and Ramanujan. Both these poets question and subvert family as an institution. Family relations are lampooned and caricatured. The ‘ghettoised’ environs of family constrict and warp the growth of an individual. Ezekiel remembers his father in a sarcastic manner in one of “Poster Poems”:
My father talked too loudly and too much
but just before he died
his voice became soft and sad
as though whispering secrets
he had learnt too late

(“Poster Poems,” CP 208)

He remembers his mother with a feeling which can at best be called unemotional and
cold. There is no sharing of mother’s sufferings and pain when she is bitten by a
scorpion. The persona in the poem gives an account of her agony in a hard, cold
manner of a newspaper reporter. Even the ending of “Night of Scorpion” is a satiric
comment on her sentimental foolishness and blind faith in God: “My mother only said
/Thank God, the scorpion picked on me / and spared my children” (CP 130). Similarly, he makes fun of husband–wife relationship when he advises people to
“divorce their wives/ and marry the servants” (“Poster Poems,” CP 208).

Placed in Chicago, Ramanujan does invoke his family in a number of poems
but that does not prove what Parthasarthy says:

Ramanujan’s repossession, through his poetry, of the past of his family and of
his sense of himself as a distillation of that past is to me a signal achievement
and one that was to be of value to other poets who are looking for a kind of
poetry to teach them the use of their voice. (192)

His invocation of family is simply a stratagem to combat his exile and also a
storehouse for rich and evocative images and metaphors. His response to family is the
response of a hybridised, hyphenated Indian who spent most of his life abroad. For
him, family is an agency which transmits diseases and programs identity through
DNA Code: “The DNA leaves copies in me and mine/ of grandfather’s violins and
programmes of much older music” (“Drafts,” TCP 158). The sonorous music of
grandfather’s violins reappears in the forms of epilepsies in his uncles: “the epilepsies
go to an uncle/ to fill him with hymns and twitches/bypassing me for now” (TCP
His mother’s migraines are transmitted to her children in the form of “allergies/a fear of black cats”. Family relations are lampooned and caricatured in Ramanujan’s poetry. The untimely death of the poet persona’s father, provides him a chance to enlist ‘debts’ he has inherited from him:

Father, when he passed on,
left dust
on a table
full of papers
left debts and daughters,
a bedwetting grandson
named by the toss
of a coin after him

(“Obituary,” TCP 111)

There is hardly a sense of sorrow or loss in the obituary to his father. Rather, the frivolous and mocking manner in which he describes his father places “Obituary” in a ‘special’ category. Even the way his father burns during his cremation becomes an issue of travesty: “Being the burning type/ he burned properly /at the cremation” (TCP 112). There is hardly a poem which celebrates family relations or values. He lampoons, caricatures and belittles his family relations – be it grandfather or father, uncles or aunts, daughters or sons. Family, for him, is a burden, a liability and unwanted inheritance he cannot escape:

One may run,
escape,
but living
among relations
binds the feet

(“Epigraph to Relations,” TCP 56)
According to the poet-persona, the family binds, constricts and even hampers the growth of an individual but he returns to it again and again. He returns to family not for cultural recuperation, but for temporary relief. He denigrates the institution of family because it breeds greed and violence but he also praises it for its assimilative nature.

The present study has been divided into five chapters. The introductory chapter discusses the coordinates of metropolitan sensibility and also the evolution of Indian Poetry in English from its earliest nationalistic and religious overtones to its present day manifestation of metropolitan sensibility. The chapter also makes an exhaustive survey of criticism available on Ezekiel and Ramanujan. The first and second chapters will study the metropolitan sensibility of Indian Poetry in English with special reference to both these poets from family and religious standpoints. The fourth chapter relates the metropolitan sensibility of Ezekiel and Ramanujan to the problematic issue of homeland. The last chapter sums up the findings of the study.
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