CHAPTER I

GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS

No true poet can escape tradition, for all our yesterdays are involved in the poet's deeper consciousness; and no true poet can escape the pressure of the present, for he is in it and of it, and the best he can do is to relate the immediate present to the living past and also ... to a future that is already in a process of becoming.

(K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar)

Nissim Ezekiel, A.K. Ramanujan and R. Parthasarathy are reputed Indian poets in English who have been acclaimed both at home and abroad. Forging their creations against a complex background of cultural, linguistic and literary traditions, they have succeeded in developing a significant poetic identity of their own. Their poetry, which is essentially lyrical in mode, is an expression of the cyclic movement of the self from the posture of alienation to that of community through love. The artistic exploration of these themes is neither new nor avant-garde. Only the contexts of the experience and their individual responses have given them an added dimension.

An attempt to analyse in depth the poetry of these three artists needs to be validated on at least four major grounds. The first and largest question is the pursuit of creative writing in a language not their own and hence their worth as
poets who have tried to achieve the well-nigh impossible task of harmonising opposed cultures, traditions and sensibilities through imagination and sheer linguistic artistry. The second is the minority status which, associated with the problem of contemporaneity, makes it an unsuitable area of study. The third is the choice of these three poets of the post-Independent era which is witness to an unprecedented boom of poetic activity. The fourth question is posed by the poetry itself - the seeming impossibility of attempting to find thematic motifs in a fragmented body of poetry which has hitherto been subject only to criticism of a general nature. As David McCutchion observes:

Among the main tasks of those who criticise or comment on this literature ... must be to examine the circumstances which produced it, establish the limits of its authenticity.

In the absence of a well-defined literary history of Indian Writing in English, the context of creation of these artists is mainly the controversy over the use of English, which has to be placed in proper perspective. The eddying patterns of this historic though dated debate suck into it the oft-discussed question of the status and fitness of English, a non-Indian or un-Indian language as a creative medium as against the mother tongue and the ambivalent position of the artist writing against a multi-cultural and multi-lingual backdrop.

All such writing has in recent years taken shelter under the umbrella 'Commonwealth literature' or 'Other Literatures in English' in the world of academia. ¹ To discuss the use of English by non-English writers may therefore seem unnecessary and even irrelevant. However, since language and culture are intrinsically linked, and the tensions in art stem from these two sources, the question has to be confronted and related to these artists writing in post-Independent India.

The inescapable fact that English is not an Indian language has led to two extreme views: one is that English should have no status, political or otherwise, in India. All writing in it is therefore of little value. The other, which is in direct opposition to this view, is that English alone has the stamp of greatness and respectability in India and therefore must be widely used. The supporters of the first view are mostly votaries of the mother tongue and that of the latter are usually academicians, artists and bourgeois citizens who depend on an English education for white collar jobs.

English in India continues to be an associate language with Hindi since Independence. Its use however has generated political and parochial violence which has ironically enough manifested itself more in the form of anti-Hindi agitations. No concrete political move has been made against its

¹ Notable among the universities offering these courses are Mysore, India and Leeds, England. University of Flinders, Australia, calls it 'Other Literatures in English'.
widespread use. As against the plea made at the All-India English Teachers' Conference, (1947) that at least one Indian University should retain English as the medium of instruction almost all the universities in India to-day have English as the language of learning, enjoying an equal status with the regional language, if not a greater. The retention of English has given the Indians access to recent publications in sociology, psychology, science and technology, and English continues to be a window on world affairs. Further, it stands as the only language of communication among Indians who would otherwise have to spend a lifetime learning the many different regional languages. It is also used in India for some of the most important purposes of the government, for 'intellectual pursuits, scientific study and higher education.'

While granting that English is indispensable as a tool par excellence for everyday communication and for the acquisition of knowledge, its creative use by Indians is still a matter of heated debate. To William Walsh, however "the capacity and range of the language is such that no reach of human experience is beyond it." B. Rajan observes:

"English is as capable of conveying the quality of meeting of East and West as part of the Indian experience as other languages and can accommodate the weight and penetrative power of a cultural tradition[other than its own], a heroic tradition which includes a Mycenaean, a dramatic tradition"

1 William Walsh, Introduction, Readings in Commonwealth Literature, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1973, p.xviii. He mentions the instance of six Heads of Departments from different universities in India being able to communicate with each other only in English.

2 Walsh, p.xvi.
which includes an Athens and a metaphysical tradition that uniquely combines the precision of philosophy with the passion of literature. 1

R.K. Narayan sees it as a very adaptable language, 'so transparent that it can take on the tint of any country.' 2

To K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar and Syad Amanuddin, English is Indian. 3

However, mother-tongue voters raise strong objections to the use of even so rich a language as English for creative writing. This animosity stems equally from the fear complex of treachery to the mother tongue and the guilt-complex of being un-Indian and therefore unpatriotic. Even as early as 1865, Michael Madhusudan Dutt in his 'Bengali Language' lamants his 'befuddledment of mind' in 'craving foreign riches' as a 'misguided child'. However, he responded to the call of the mother tongue and found his 'home' in 'its depths of beauty.'

In recent times, Masti Iyengar, Jyotirmaya Datta and Buddhadeva Bose have championed the cause of the mother


tongue. They lament the inconceivable loss of the mother tongue due to the pursuit of English. To them, no foreigner can fully understand another language which has its own unique features.

Datta's famous article in Quest written in a bantering tone covers all aspects of this controversy and forms a convenient springboard to review the situation. He styles all such Indian writers in English as 'freaks'. He denies the language its richness. It cannot suggest feelings but chart courses of action and is used not to explore new ideas but to communicate readymade ones, and so, to him, these writers have chosen a self-imposed isolation, the most terrible sort of exile. Lal's claim which Datta strongly opposes strikes the other extreme of cherishing English alone as Indian:

".... Only in English can real Indian poetry be written: any other poetry is likely to be Bengali slanted or Gujarati-biassed and so on. Only Indian writing in English can hope to attain the Indian flavour."

1 David McCutcheon quotes Masti Iyengar as declaring that the use of English should be abolished both within the country and outside, p.26.

2 Buddhadeva Bose, "Indian Poetry in English," The Concise Encyclopedia of English and American Poets and Poetry, 1970 ed. p.142. The entry sparked off a literary battle with P. Lal publishing his 'Modern Indian Poetry in English' in 1971 which included replies from poets to his questions based on Bose's observations.


4 Datta, p.292. This is an oft-quoted passage in the controversy over the use of English.
Both points of view need to be modified. While English is indispensable for pan-Indian communication, the possibility of any other language being so cannot be ruled out. Just as any Indian can write in English so also as member of one linguistic group, he can choose another Indian language for his creative expression as for example Kalso in Gujarati and Bandra in Kannada. Their position is similar to that of European artists like Ilinska, Koestler, and Nabakov who have used English. Translations of their works into the many European or Indian languages as the case may be have enabled them to cut across linguistic or geographic barriers and reach to the universal. And in India, the multilingual situation warrants the retention and use of English for some more time rather than its rejection.

Ezickel and Ramanujan while using English for their creative expression, translate into English from the mother tongue. This has brought them closer to the Indian landscape and has enabled them to reveal the universal dimensions of what Lal might call a Marathi-biased or Kannada — and Tamil-biased literature. These two artists have no inhibitions about writing in English or translating into English for they believe that the language of creative expression is the author's autonomy and cannot be dictated by any other factor.

1 Krishna Kripalani, Modern Indian Literature, Bombay, Nirmala Sadanand, 1968, p.102.

2 'Indian Writing in English: A reply to Mr. Jyotirmoy Datta' in Ten Years of Quest, p.303.
In reply to Lal's questionnaire, A.K. Ramanujan takes a detached and non-controversial stand:

If you ask me why I write in English, I have complicated answers which are not worth putting down. I just happen to write in English. It is not a matter of controversy whether people can, will or should write in a particular language.  

Over the question of choice of language, he avers:

I don't think people who write have a choice in the matter. It may be that an Indian writing in English condemns himself to writing minor marginal verse. But I don't think anybody can choose either in Bengali or in English to write major verse or any verse at all worth the name.  

Where Buddhadeva Bose feels strongly that Indians cannot and should not write in English and Lal equally strongly feels that they can and should, Ramanujan clinches the issue thus:

I think the real question is whether they can. And if they can, they will.  

Ezekiel too takes an equally objective stance and refuses to be moved with emotion and sentiment over the language issue:

Contemporary poets in India generally write in English when they have gone through English medium schools. I write in English for this reason and for  

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1 P.Lal, ed. Modern Indian Poetry in English, Calcutta, Writers Workshop, 1969, p.444. More than a hundred poets have replied to this question of why write in English. While some said it came to them naturally, others cite their English education as a reason. A few wrote in English because they did not know any other language.

2 P.Lal, p.445.

3 P.Lal, p.445.
cannot write in any Indian language... To write poetry in English because one cannot write in any other language is surely not a despicable decision.¹

Of mother-tongue zealots, Ezekial has this ironic comment to make:

... We know them well enough, these linguistic patriots in India who write so fluently in English. They also edit magazines of verse in English, teach English, read English books and periodicals and conduct virtually their entire social and personal life in English while quite rightly championing the mother tongue.²

The dilemma of choice between English and mother-tongue finds poignant expression in Parthasarathy's poetry. He is one of the few poets who have not answered Lal's questions as he is torn between his tremendous sense of guilt in using a language which he is convinced alienates him from his own cultural and spiritual roots and his fascination for it as nourisher of his imaginative life. He styles himself a 'poet in search of a language.'³ Though he feels that his 'tongue is in English chains' he confesses that his creativity stems from the fruitful tension between English and Tamil, his mother tongue. He theorises that English is part of his intellectual rational make-up and Tamil part of his emotional psychic make up.⁴ However, this cleavage is not discernible

¹ P.Lal, p.171.
² P.Lal, p.171.
⁴ R.Parthasarathy, p.10. Also mentioned in his article 'Talking and Reading Poetry', Expos, 1978, p.4.
in his poetry for it is in English that he expresses the pain and brooding disenchchantment of his cultural confusion.

Parthasarathy represents the poetic counterpart of Indian critics like B. Rajan and Uma Parameswaran who see no future for the phenomenon of Indian Writing in English, ironically enough in forceful and impeccable English. B. Rajan, though a reputed critic and novelist in English, observes that it is "incapable of conveying the inwardness of 'Indianness' due to a sense of superiority of alien values." Uma Parameswaran goes a step further and fixes the dirge date of Indian Writing in English as 2000 A.D.:

All the successful writers of to-day were born in the days of the British Raj and even the younger writers have had English as the medium of instruction at school and university. Once this pre-independence generation dies, no more Indian English Literature.

But this 'death' has become more or less a dying into life with all the Apollonian agony. Parthasarathy himself observes:

In examining the phenomenon of Indian verse, in English one comes up first of all against the paradox that it did not seriously begin to exist till after the withdrawal of the British from India...
Adil Jussawalla also maintains that English came into its own as a language capable of poetry only after Indians got independence.\textsuperscript{1} P.H. Butter, even in 1963 has perceptively pointed out that independence has enabled these writers to write in English "without any sense of using the language of the conquerors."\textsuperscript{2} These statements are corroborated by the efflorescence of creative writing in English since independence, and these three artists are among the pioneering contributors.

However, the problem of writing in an alien tongue persists. Parthasarathy states that to him the 'situation is the poetry' and takes the extreme stance of asserting that if the tension arising out of the conflicting choice of language resolves he will stop writing poetry altogether.\textsuperscript{3} He still continues to write in English as do Ezekiel and Ramanujan, even while gravitating towards the mother tongue. Their poetry balances the tension between freedom and control. To them, freedom lies in the choice and use of English and the greatness of their art is seen in the superb control they have over their medium.\textsuperscript{4}


\textsuperscript{2} "Some Indian Periodicals", A Review of English Literature, 4, No.2, 1963, p.36.

\textsuperscript{3} 'Poet in Search of a Language', p.10.

\textsuperscript{4} As illustrated in the analyses of the poems in the ensuing chapters.
This controversy over the use of English continues to be a 'popular' subject of debate in the English dailies and weeklies published in India. Eminent artists including Nissim Ezekiel, Mulk Raj Anand, K. Kamala Das and R.K. Narayan have shown that the 'polemics' of the issue is needless. It has served to deflect the attention from the works themselves which need to be examined in depth. The achievement of Conrad and Tagore is enough to explode the Yeatsian myth that one can write best only in one's mother tongue. English, to these artists is the 'language of their cultural upbringing and environment' and their creative achievement in it deserves critical scrutiny. As G.S. Balarama Gupta observes:

1 Some of them are Illustrated Weekly of India, Sunday Standard, Quest, Sunday and Onlooker.


3 W.B. Yeats, even while asserting that no man can think or write with music and vigour except in his mother tongue, has lavished praise on Tagore's Gitanjali and paradoxically enough has confessed that he could not write in Gaelic.

4 "The language of one's cultural upbringing and environment is the best medium for creative expression. Such a language may even be foreign." Krishna Kripalani, Modern Indian Literature, Bombay, Nirmala Sadanand, 1968, p. 102.
It is absurd to ask why choose English. The more pertinent question would be to find what one has done with his choice, whether or not he has been successful in his literary endeavour.¹

That these artists have been successful is evident in the reputation that they command both in India and abroad. Among those who praise them are Linda Hess, William Walsh, P.H. Butter, Roger Iredale and Alan Ross. Linda Hess, in her pioneering article has this tribute to pay to Ezekiel:

[He is] the most outstanding in craftsmanship, maturity, range and depth of sensibility. Equally at home in free verse or in metre and rhyme, channelling a large and fluid sensibility through tightly controlled instruments of form and refinements of thought, juxtaposing and fusing intense intellectuality with passionate sensual experience, Ezekiel entwines the reader's mind and emotion in his verse.²

William Walsh, the 'champion' of Commonwealth Literature, describes Ezekiel's poetry as "intellectually complex, mobile in phrasing, fastidious in diction, and austere in acceptance."³ Butter compares him favourably with the Movement Poets.⁴ Iredale commands "his mastery of a poetic

¹ "Indian Writing in English: Isn't there any worth in it?" Paper presented at the All India English Teachers' Conference, Madras, 1979.
⁴ P.H. Butter, p.37.
technique and range of styles and interests that justify his reputation as one of the key Commonwealth poets working to-day." 1 Alan Ross singles him out as the "one Indian poet who can handle the more formal aspects of English prosody with any skill." 2

Eminent Indian critics like K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar, the 'father' of Indian writing in English, C.D. Narasimhiah, Saleem Peeradina, Adil Jussawalla and Suresh Kohli have given signal recognition to Ezekiel's poetic achievement.

K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar praises him thus:

An artist who is willing to take pains, to cultivate reticence, to pursue the profession of poetry with a sense of commitment, Ezekiel's poems are as a rule lucid—a merit these days—and are splendidly evocative and satisfyingly sensuous. 3

To Jussawalla, he is "the first Indian poet consistently to show Indian readers that craftsmanship is as important to a poem as its subject matter." 4 Peeradina calls him "the first important Indian poet who in terms of significant output can

1 "Indian Poetry in English To-day", Quest, No. 98, Nov.-Dec. 1975, p. 74.


4 Adil Jussawalla, p. 79.
Still be counted as one of the best."¹ C.D.Narasimhiah, a critic of international repute, types him to be a "serious poet [with a genuine sophistication in the use of language born of fine insights into life]."²

The most significant tribute to Ezekiel, which cuts across regional and cultural preciousness, has been the publication of The Journal of South Asian Literature as an Ezekiel number in 1975. It stands as the only collected works of so eminent a poet and also as a unique critical study of Ezekiel's varied roles as poet, playwright and critic. In The Ensphering Mind (Three Crown Press) he is classed with Alan Currow, A.D. Hope, A.M. Klein, Christopher Ogiebe and Derek Walcott, a signal honour.³

While Nissim Ezekiel has six volumes of poetry, three plays and many critical articles to his credit, A.K. Ramanujan and R. Parthasarathy are slender in their creative output. Ramanujan has only two collections of poems which have been well-received. Walsh describes him as "the most gifted and most individual, the composer of an alert and grainy poetry whose touch is abrasive and whose sight is microscopic."⁴ Commending his admirable technique, Iredale remarks that he

¹ Introduction, Contemporary Indian Poetry in English, Madras, Macmillan, 1977, p.ix.
³ The book is to be published soon.
"manages to perform the difficult task of creating rhythms and cadences that are profoundly poetic."¹ S.C. Harreex singles out his notable quality "of conceiving and sharply delineating an image" and observes that he uses language with a "surgeon like precision."²

To K.R. Srinivasas Iyengar, he is "one of the most talented of the new poets."³ Ezekiel observes that his poems "function like precision instruments."⁴ Satyanarain Singh elaborates this comment in his pioneering comparative study of Ezekiel and Ramanujan:

Ramanujan's poetry is image oriented. His genius looks for the particular, the precise and the concrete as against the general, the vague and the abstract.⁵

Devendra Kohli is justifiably impressed by Ramanujan's rare ability to turn anything into a poetic theme. He attempts to establish his superiority over his contemporaries even if it is through the use of negatives:

¹ 'Indian Poetry in English To-day', Quest, Bombay, No. 98, 1975, pp. 73-74.
⁴ 'Two Poets: Ramanujan and Daruwala,' Rav. of Relations in The Illustrated Weekly of India, 93, No. 25, June 18, 1972, p. 44.
He is neither delicately ceremonial like Mr. Lal, nor studiously civilised like Ezekiel. Unlike Kamala Das, he can keep his personality from flowing too directly into the body of his poems though his best poems are the ones in which he recaptures his Indian memories with humour and a light touch. His comic imagination does not let him become morose and solemn as Zulfiqar Ghose often is, or slip into the self-satisfied smirk at the expense of people and memories that Naipaul, Moreas and Vad Mahta are prone to.  

R. Parthasarathy's reputation as a poet rests on his one published collection of poems _Rough Passage_ (1976) planned as a single poem depicting the journey of the self through life as man and artist. He also has a number of stray poems (not collected in a volume) which have been widely published in India and abroad and many of which in refined versions have gone to the making of _Rough Passage_. He is thus more a poet of quality rather than quantity. To William Walsh, he is "one of the most engaging and gifted of the new generation of Indian poets". Roger Ireson praises his art with fine insight:

The remarkable thing about Parthasarathy's poetry and it is a quality that manifests itself throughout the whole of his work - is the powerful blend of a highly emotional quality of thought with an iron discipline of language and intellect.

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1. 'Passionate Sincerity in Indian Poetry in English', _The Journal of Commonwealth Literature_, 9, No.1, Aug.1974, p.29.


3. 'Indian Poetry in English To-day', _Quest_, No.98, 1975, p.73.
Like Ross, K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar and H.H. Anning Gouda single out his 'austerity' for special mention. Iyengar observes:

Of the poets who cultivate an extreme austerity of style, R. Parthasarathy is probably the most successful. His best poems reveal an uncommon talent and sensibility that deliberately puts shackles on itself. ¹

Gouda types him "as a man of cultivated taste (writing) imagistic verse of austerity." ² Peeradina acclaims him to be "a diligent poet, the most scrupulous as far as polish and precision and exact image is concerned." ³

In the days of controversy between poets, Nissim Ezekiel has this handsome tribute to pay to this one-volume poet in 1973, when he had no published collection to his credit:

Wherever Indian poetry in English is written or talked about here and abroad, his work is mentioned with respect, for his meticulous use of words, the controlled rhythms and the careful choice of poetic images. ⁴

That these three poets have been the focus discriminating critical attention is seen in the fact that critics have also tried to discover their weaknesses. Ezekiel's predilection for philosophy in The Exact Name

¹ K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar, p. 673.
³ Saleem Peeradina, p. ix.
makes Jussawalla call it 'cloudiness': 1 The simplistic endings of many of his poems sound 'lit' to R.H. Lesser. 2 Parthasarathy is his own harsh critic in his ruthless exegesis of many of his poems. Ramanujan's orientation towards the image makes Satyanarain Singh attribute a thinness of thought content to his poetry. 3

Their reputation in terms of poetic achievement can be said to have proved true the prophecy of William Walsh in 1973

... The future, the promise is in the poetry, in the work of Nissim Ezekiel, A.K. Ramanujan and R. Parthasarathy. It is in the writing of poetry that the predicament of the writer in English for whom it is a second language shows itself most clearly and agonisingly. 4

While the predicament of language and culture becomes the poetry in Rough Passage, in Ezekiel's and Ramanujan's art, it is not so much language as the complex problem of life with its inherent paradox of tradition and modernity, of seeking cultural roots in displacement. This is Parthasarathy's dilemma too; only he links it with his choice of language for creative expression.

A knowledge of the tradition and culture that inspires any work of art is necessary as no artist is an isolated

1 Adil Jussawalla, p.77.
3 Satyanarain Singh, p.70.
phenomenon. He has his affiliations with the past and the present. While he owes a conscious or unconscious debt to the makers of literature in the past, he is also very much of his times and breathes the spirit of his age - the Zeitgeist. His affiliation can be traced to the historical and cultural past of his nation, his community and even his own personal past, a microcosm in the macrocosm of a vast and hoary tradition which includes cross-fertilisations from the world over. To identify the background of these Indian artists writing in English thus becomes difficult. The genealogy of tradition and culture inspiring them is too complex to fit into the neat tree diagrams of history books. These artists have a common 'English' background by virtue of their education. But their 'personal' past, is so different.

Ezekiel is a Jew of Bene-Israel origins settled in India, Ramanujan, a Tamil Brahmin from Mysore and expatriate settled in U.S. and R. Parthasarathy, a Tamil Brahmin living in India. These three are writing in a language ostensibly not their own and have to come to terms with their own traditional upbringing and the 'culture' of their English education.

The tradition behind all such writing is more than Janus-faced. It looks in all directions and reflects diverse colours like the faces of a prism. It is both Indian and English-rejects one, accepts the other or attempts to fuse both — and in all this is expressive of the multi-dimensional quality of a heterogenous culture. India's cultural heritage includes the mystical, religious, mythical and secular treasures of not only the Hindu but also the
Muslim, the Christian, the Parsi and the Jew. In the process of acculturation as a result of political subjugation, this prismatic culture has added to it the hues of the English tradition, an amalgamation of the Celtic, Graeco-Roman and Teutonic civilisations. Hence, the pristine purity and exclusive stamp of national culture is impossible to discover in the writings of Indians.

This 'marriage' of 'English' and non-English (here Indian) as a result of the cross-fertilisation of global cultures has generated the critical controversy over the quantum of 'Indianness' or 'Englishness' or 'Africaness' not only to affix a national stamp to the creations forged against this background but also to assess their worth.

To attempt to pinpoint the intangible quality of national flavour is as futile as putting the violet in a crucible to discover its fragrance. These three poets are as much Indians, having been born and brought up in India, as Chinua Achebe is an African or T.S. Eliot, an Englishman. This issue however is complicated further by two prickly problems. Is the writing Indian in sensibility and English in expression or English in sensibility and Indian in expression? Is it then possible to isolate an Indian English or 'Bharat Brand' of English? The next question is, is it necessary to identify one such English in a desperate attempt to escape the stamp of hybridness and earn a badge of respectability?

Literature after the '50's has become more and more cosmopolitan in texture. In what Graham Hough brands as an
"age of arbitrary migrations and displacement" there has been a certain de-nationalisation of literature. Creative artists like T.S. Eliot, W.H. Auden, Sylvia Plath, Randolph Stowe and nearer home Ramanujan, Raja Rao, Shiret Chandra, Dom Moreas and Kamala Markandaya are expatriates and project the tensions of their inherent and acquired sensibilities, of both Indian and English in the case of the latter group. Also with the eclecticism, both geographic and historical, that has swept man off his feet, what is significant is the universal appeal of a work of art, not its quantum of 'Indianness', 'Englishness' or 'Americaniness'. Whether they are committed to a "tradition of daffodils rather than hibiscus" is conditioned by their individual vision and whatever their orientation is, it is the universal and human dimensions that contribute to artistic worth.

The study of 'Indianness' with reference to the English language has in recent times become a linguist's paradise. Braj Kachru's papers have been followed up by seminars on Indian English, notable being the one at CIEFL in 1972. The Kachru papers confine themselves to examples from the

2 David McCutchion, p. 55.
4 In this seminar, papers on various aspects of Indian English were presented by K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar, Mulk Raj Anand, Meenakshi Mukherjee, Braj Kachru, G.S. Amur and William Walsh among others. Published in *Indian Writing in English*, ed. Ramesh Mohan, Madras, Orient Longman, 1978.
novel more particularly from the milieu of characters. His 'clime of bilingualism' has influenced later scholarship on the lexical features of English which are transparently Indian. However, this cannot be extended to the language of poetry as 'Indianiness' is a will to the wise quality to trace. No Indian poet or novelist with the possible exception of G.V. Desani or Raja Rao has so used the language to give it the stamp of 'Indian'. These three poets have not consciously tried to 'Indianise' English in any way, but their 'Indianiness' is evident in their attitude to life and their esoteric allusions. And here too, their art reaches to the universal.

In this connection, Ezekiel's 'Very Indian Poems in English' deserve scrutiny. In these eight poems, he has succeeded in putting to poetic use for humorous effect the common errors of the average Indian speaker of English especially when he translates literally the words of his language into English. The most repeated error is the use of the present continuous tense (an Indian favourite) for the simple present resulting in absurd structures as 'our dear sister/is departing for foreign' or 'You are all knowing

1 In All about H. Hatterr (Aldor, 1948), G.V. Desani's imaginative use of the varieties of English has made it an Indian classic. Raja Rao's use of English to simulate Indian syntax in Mantapura (Allen & Unwin, 1938) is still considered a linguistic achievement.

2 The most popular are Goodbye Party to Miss. Pushpa, Very Indian Poem in English and The Professor.
my friends.' The article, the fatal Cleopatra to the Indian (or any foreigner to English) is also used where it should not be and omitted where it is needed, as in 'she is most popular lady' or 'I am always appreciating good spirit.' While Ezekiel's poems reveal the Indian's 'creative' use of the language, it is obvious that at best Indian English can be a dialectal variety of English and exists only at the phonological level. This is substantiated by the fact that these poems have obtained the maximum response when read with Indian pronunciation and intonation as seen in the poet's reading of his poems to various audiences. It is to Ezekiel's credit as a poet that he has deployed these idiosyncrasies for humorous effect. Parthasarathy's attempt in 'Incident at Ahmedpore Station: A Letter' is too contrived and does not possess the spontaneity and sense of fun that characterise Ezekiel's poems. Joseph Furtado, before Ezekiel, has been alive to the 'comic' potential of this kind of English and has caught it in the rhythm and diction of his 'The Fortune Teller':

Saib's yea now forty-four,
Live certain forty more
I tell no more, no less
But what be pucka guess.

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1 'Goodbye Party to Miss Pushpa', Hymns in Darkness, New Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1976, p.23.
2 'Goodbye Party to Miss Pushpa'.
4 Selected Poems, Bombay, Joseph Furtado, 1942.
In 'The Old Irani' as in 'The Fortune Taller', the tripping ballad metre, the use of Indian words without translation like 'Pani', 'Majah' and 'Kalapani' and the Indian manner of English speech contribute to the folksy charm. Ezekiel has made capital out of syntactical and grammatical inaccuracies while Furtado has skilfully used 'Hindi' words in the English poem for humorous effect.

With the exception of these attempts at 'Very Indian Poems in English', the poets have used a language that is close to the parent variety. A national stamp can possibly be affixed on American or even African English but not on the English used by these Indian poets who have conformed to the current usage, 'dislocating' it only for their 'poetic' purpose and not for injecting 'Indianness'.

Again, in terms of content or theme, they transcend the merely Indian and deal with the problems of twentieth-century man. The 'exotica' that has been traditionally attributed to India is conspicuous by its absence. These poets have attempted to see life in realistic terms and their cultural and creative sensibilities owe much to both Indian and Western traditions.

The validity of studying contemporary works such as the present one is frequently called into question. This is because of a certain conservatism and academic snobbishness that


2 Their art can be compared to that of many New Zealand poets who closely follow the traditional patterns of British Poetry.
"excludes the study of recent literature and scarcely any work after Milton's was considered a quite respectable object for study." An added reason for the reluctance is the traditional view that the student has to forego "the perspectiva of the completed work, of the explication which later works make to the implication of the earlier." Again, very few contemporary works can attain the status of a classic and are considered minor works till posterity gives due recognition to them.

In spite of all this, there has been a growing interest in contemporary works. The scholar can approach it with a first-hand knowledge of the setting and time. He has the experience of similar patterns of life resulting in a greater understanding of the works as compared with the knowledge gained from books alone. The living artist provides the opportunity for personal acquaintance, interrogation, interviews and at times even explication of his own works. Nissim Ezekiel, R.Parthasarathy and K.K.Ramanujan exemplify this. Further, the works allow a certain freshness of approach, an autonomy in judgment which is not always possible in established works "as it is easier to rely on the verdict of the ages [due to] academic timidity or lack of perception." As T.S.Eliot points out, "contemporary poetry

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2 Wellek and Warren, p.44.
3 See Appendix.
4 Wellek and Warren, p.45.
offers the chance of exercising our own taste without attempting to type the poetry as major or minor.\textsuperscript{1}

These three poets, as has already been shown are contemporary artists of repute. Others like Kamala Das, Arun Kolatkar and Kaki Daruwalla in the seventies command a similar reputation. While Kolatkar and Daruwalla have attained prominence in the last decade and Kamala Das is an essentially feminine voice, these three poets can be called the pace setters and pioneers of post-Independence Indian Poetry in English. They have drawn the attention of the English speaking world from the mid-fifties and find a coveted place in the well-known anthologies of Commonwealth Poetry as representative poets from India.\textsuperscript{2} Their poems have been published regularly in internationally reputed journals and magazines such as \textit{Encounter}, \textit{The London Magazine}, \textit{Times Literary Supplement}, \textit{The Critical Quarterly} and \textit{Quest}.

They stand in a class by themselves in terms of quality. Unlike B. R. Nandy who is prolific as poet and poet-editor, these three poets have displayed a rapier sense of discrimination in their poetic output. Poetry, to all of


them, is an ascetic art to be cultivated with finesse. As Ezekiel himself declares in 'Poet Lover and Birdwatcher', 'the best poets wait for words.' They patiently wait for the muse to inspire them. This is seen in the time-lag of fifteen years between Ezekiel's *The Exact Name* (1961) and *Hymns in Darkness* (1976). Ramanujan also has only a few stray poems after the publication of *Relations* (1971). Parthasarathy has written very little after *Rough Passage* (1976).

This does not mean that meagre output is a necessary correlate of high worth: only the possibility of diminution in quality in terms of greater output cannot be overruled. It is not as if the spring of inspiration has run dry: the meagreness is partly because of the demands of disciplined, chiselled craft and partly due to the fact that they are academics or professionals engaged in poetry. Parthasarathy's constant revisions of his poems are only acts of 'critical selection' aiming at perfect form. As Brijraj Singh half-humorously observes:

Parthasarathy's poetic gift lies in creating the maximum effect of meaning through the least budging silence.

And in the poems themselves, the insistent refusal to be prolific is seen, which makes Eliot's words come truly alive:

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The word neither diffident nor ostentatious,
The common word exact without vulgarity
The formal word precise but not pedantic.

(Little Gidding)

If the later poets like Keki Daruwalla display verbal economy
or tautness of expression, it is an unconscious debt they owe
to these artists who have always been conscientious craftsmen.
And it is this meticulous attention to craft that has been
responsible for their reputation especially at a time of a
phenomenal quantitative increase in poetic activity.

These poets all share the privilege of a coveted
university education in English and are well-known in the
world of academia. They have fed themselves on 'large
spoonfuls of English brew' which has never 'quite slaked
their thirst.' Born before the British left India, they
were exposed to the English language and consequently its
culture from their childhood. All three possess a Master's
Degree in English Language and Literature and are well-known
both as teachers and as poets. They exemplify an interesting
aspect of some University Departments in India and abroad,
which have poets and critics as teachers:

1 Nissim Ezekiel, born in 1924, attended Antonio
D'Souza School, Bombay. Ramanujan, born in 1929, went to
Bhanumiah's School, Mysore. Parthasarathy, born in 1934, went
to the Don Bosco Missionary School in Bombay. All three
studied with English as their medium of instruction.

2 Notable among them are Robert Frost, Cleanth Brooks
in America and K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar in India.
Ezekiel is Professor of American Literature at an
University of Bombay. A.K.Ramanujan, one-time Professor of
English in Mysore, is a Professor of Linguistic and Dravidian
Studies, University of Chicago. R.Parthasarathy had been a
Professor of English till 1970 and is currently an editor in
Oxford University Press, Delhi. He continues to be actively
interested in the problems of the academic world because of
his publishing zeal and because he participates in academic
conferences, seminars and poetry reading sessions.¹

Nurtured on solid English foundations, they made their
impact on the Indian-English landscape in the fifties and
sixties. Ezekiel published his first volume A Time to Change
in 1952 even as R.Parthasarathy won his poetry prize in
school sponsored by the Free Press Bulletin in 1958. In
1956, his first poem was published in Quest, edited by Nissim
Ezekiel. Ramanujan's first volume The Striders which won
the Poetry Book Society Award was published in 1966. Their
names have always been clubbed together in any critical
study of Indian Poetry in English. And in Parthasarathy's
case, this is a signal honour as his one and only volume of
poetry appeared as late as 1976 when Ezekiel had published
his sixth slim volume Hymns in Darkness (1976) and Ramanujan,
his second, Relations (1971).

While they share a similar academic background, their
relation to the Indian scene provides interesting and

¹ He has read his poems in Commonwealth Literature
Conferences, All India English Teachers' Conferences and at
Seminars on Indian Writing in English.
fruitful contrasts. All possess the enriching even if disturbing experience of living abroad—not merely confronting western culture on home ground—and this has modified their vision of life in poetic terms. Nissim Ezekiel has travelled extensively in America and Britain and has been a kind of cultural ambassador of India. His Jewish community settled in the Konkan and Maharashtra country nearly two centuries ago.¹ Linda Hess 'nativises' him by calling him a 'Jewish Maharashtrian'.² However, he prefers to be called 'Bene-Israel' and is as proud and critical of his non-Indian origins as he is of being part of India. The sense of rootlessness that he feels is not deep enough to upset his mental balance. He is a well-adjusted Indian and has no serious quarrel with himself or his environs as seen in the poetry.³

A.K. Ramanujan belongs to a family of Tamil Brahmins settled in Mysore. His orthodox Brahminic upbringing has made indelible impressions on his psyche and has been recovered with a tragic even if critical sense of loss in the corpus of his poetry. His amazing proficiency in Tamil, Kannada and English has made him an eminent translator and linguist. He has opted to settle in the United States as a full-fledged academic. Born Indian and being 'American' (by virtue of his permanent settlement there) he belongs to

¹ Moses Ezekiel, History and Culture of the Bene-Israel in India, n.p., 1948, pp.5-6.
² Linda Hess, p.27.
³ A major idea that is the theme of the ensuing analyses especially in Chapter II.
the roll call of double citizenship owing allegiance to both India and America — the India which has shaped him and the America which has adopted him. This poet is like the boy who cannot escape from his shadow for even after fifteen years of life abroad, he cannot forget his native land, his roots. This refusal to be transplanted and be wholly American is manifested in the poignant and at times violent clinging to the Indian past in many of his poems. The poet, though expatriate is still very much an Indian, longing for the 'old creation and for the old folks at home' even while being critical about them.

Like Ezekial and A.K. Ramanujan, R. Parthasarathy also has been abroad twice — first in 1964 in England when he went to Leeds as Research Fellow and then in 1978 when he was invited to the Iowa Workshop of Poets. His English education had so completely westernised him that he was 'hyper-critical' of everything Indian and even wanted to settle abroad. He represents the paradigm of the English Brahmin (a far cry from Tagore's Gora) too steeped in an English education to realise at the outset itself the value of his native roots. Not possessing the tremendous energy, intellect and spirituality of Shri Aurobindo or even the fervour of Michael Madhusudhan Dutt, R. Parthasarathy took a long time to resurrect the 'Indian' in him, as vividly narrated in his autobiographical essay.1 According to him,

it contains the 'locus classicus' of his poetic and personal life recreated as poetry in *Rough Passage*. The cultural shock in England forced him to return home. However, he could not reconcile himself to the situation at home and found himself doubly exiled - an exile in England in spite of his English education and an exile at home because of it. Also as Editor in English, he is cut off from the mainstream of Indian tradition. Parthasarathy can be said to exemplify the cultural confusion of the westernised Indian living in India who longs to be Indian but is too steeped in a foreign culture to return to his own and accept it unquestioningly. Parthasarathy desperately tries to effect a 'home-coming' to his culture - made doubly difficult because of his 'English' situation and his insufficient knowledge of his tradition. The sense of guilt and feeling of disenchantment that mark his poetry make him an alienated Indian striving to accept a situation which may be called 'Indish', against which his refined intellect revolts.

Like Ezekiel, it can be said of Parthasarathy that his poetry is what he is and represents his sincere efforts to come to terms with the baffling complexity of his life as man and artist. It enshrines the main problem that causes him great anguish - his predicament of being in two

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1 *Exposé*, p.3.

2 Other hybrid varieties of special features are 'Hinglish' (Hindi & English), Tamlish (Tamil & English). These are analogous to 'Franglais' of Professor Etienne.
different worlds of language and culture and his almost
chronic inability to relate them meaningfully. While he sees
the 'tension' as the source of his poetry, Brijraj Singh
observes:

It is a situation he finds both thrilling and
absurd in equal proportions. It is the situation
out of which some of his most memorable poems
develop, it is also the situation which seems to
be impelling him towards poetic silence.¹

Parthasarathy's poetic thrust stemming from his
linguistic and cultural predicament may also be in part due
to his theory of poetry that it should reach the condition
of aphasia or silence and speechlessness.² While Ramanujan
and Ezekiel have not expressed any such view, they share
with R Parthasarathy the genuine concern over their art.

Though Parthasarathy and Ramanujan are Brahmins, their
attitude to their past is different. Both are family-oriented
but Ramanujan is actively critical of its hypocrisies while
Parthasarathy is silent about them and is only nostalgic,
preferring to gaze at himself in an urban set-up where he is
concerned more with himself. Where Ramanujan confronts the
'ills' of family in startlingly realistic terms,
Parthasarathy remains at the periphery of family re-unions
and reminisces about his Brahminic past in subjective terms,
without the 'criticalness' of Ramanujan.

¹ Brijraj Singh, TS., p.1.
² R Parthasarathy, Ten Twentieth-Century Indian Poets,
p.11.
Their relation to the Indian scene can thus be regarded as a graded mixture of 'Indianness' and 'alienness' and this is manifested in the cyclic movement from alienation to community. If Ezekiel is the 'native alien', R.Parthasarathy is the 'alienated native' and A.K.Ramanujan is the 'expatriate native'. Their unique situations have helped to shape the tone and attitudes reflected in their poetry.

An in-depth study of these poets can be further justified when examining the nature of criticism available. The body of poetry in English after 1960 has grown out of proportion and criticism has hardly kept pace with this boom in production. It is a dynamic and perservering group like Writers Workshop that has done yeoman service to creative and critical writing in English. Through weekly meetings, production of a bi-monthly called The Miscellany and publications of a number of books and pamphlets it has provided a forum for exchange of ideas. It has been a source of encouragement to the writers' everflagging morale at a time when conditions of publication of poetry in the sixties have been particularly inauspicious in India. The Workshop has given many poets an opportunity to appear in print, either in individual pieces or in collections. Ezekiel had two of his volumes The Unfinished Man and The Exact Name published by the concern. Ramanujan's Fifteen Love Poems bears the workshop imprint as also Parthasarathy's Poetry From Leeds which he co-edited with Healy. In recent times, other publishing houses have taken interest in publishing poetry. While the collections are numerous and varied,
individual contributions are minimal. This has served as a deterrent to critical studies as the critic is hard put to discover trends or moods in so fragmented a body of poetry created by highly individual artists.

The poets themselves think that their works have not been systematically criticised. As Ezekiel says:

None of my poems has been subjected to systematic criticism. In India, there just isn't any serious criticism of poetry in English by Indians, so I have had to rely on random judgements. There is no tradition of literary judgment in India. 2

However, Ezekiel has won the attention of the critics, more than any other post-Indepandent poet. 3 The criticism of others that is available is in the introductions to numerous anthologies (of which there has been a spurt in the '70's) and stray critical articles of a general nature. Occasionally, there is an in-depth analysis of a particular poem. 4 There has been very little attempt to place the...

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1 For example Arun Kolatkar has only one volume Jajuri which won the Commonwealth Poetry Prize. Only Pritish Nandy has about a dozen volumes of his poetry and many anthologies to his credit.


3 Two books on him, one by Chetan Karnani, and the other by Anisur Rahman have been published. Writers Workshop has published a monograph on him. Pritish Nandy, among the other poets of the '50's, has a critical book on him.

poets or even the poems in a critical framework. The
utterances usually tend to be suggestive rather than
affirmative and systematic analysis of theme and technique
is rarely done. The focus has been more on empirical issues
rather than analysis which the New Critics emphasise as very
important to the proper understanding of the poem.

Again with comparative studies gaining popularity,
strained comparisons have been made in which the individual
achievement is not sufficiently emphasised. For example,
when Sarojini Naidu and Kamala Das are compared, the Krishna
theme that is an obvious motif in the former's poetry is
artificially superimposed on the latter.¹ These comparative
studies at times tend to detract from the intrinsic value
of the individual body of poetry and more so of a corpus
which has only in recent times attracted the attention of
critics. Unless individual studies are made with a systematic
analysis of theme and technique, comparative studies usually
prove to be mere academic exercises.

The present study therefore focusses more on the
individual body of poetry in order to see it in proper
perspective and attempts to assess its place in the making
of a tradition. The reliance is mainly on the tools of the
New Critics and the spotlight is on the works which merit

¹ In 'Mary and Mira: A Study of Kamala Das,' I.K. Sharma
compares her to Mary Wollenscraft. "Studies in Indian Poetry,
close scrutiny. As in drama, where the 'play's the thing' so in poetry, the poem is the most important consideration. However, the 'contexts of creation,' the extrinsic considerations in interpreting a work of art have not been totally eschewed.

To superimpose a thematic sequence on a fragmented body of poetry may at first sight appear to be a 'dislocation' of the poetry for the sake of critical convenience. A close study of the poetry reveals that such a coherence is possible. Only there are no chronological parallels for the thematic states and some later poems reflect the mood and tone of the earlier ones. The patterning thus becomes cyclic rather than linear and is from alienation to community through love without a total surrender of one or the other at a given point in time.

The poetry of these three artists can be characterised mainly as the poetry of the individual self experiencing the world in an existential frame of reference. Nissim Ezekiel, A.K.Ramanujan and R.Parthasarathy aim to concretise personal experience in their art in objective terms. They are not concerned with the mystical and transcendental apprehension of life which is the staple of the Aurobindo school of poetry. In theme and technique, they have rejected whatever is vague and general. They do not go back

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to Indian lore, Vedic philosophy and the rich tradition of a hoary national past. They have not attempted a re-
interpretation of Hindu religion and thought as Shri Aurobindo has, making poetry the handmaiden of philosophy.

These poets are deeply concerned with the individual past, its immediacy and direct appeal to intuitive understanding and its relevance to the development of the self. The poetry can be typified as the poetry of the existential self as against the poetry of the divine or transcendental self. What is explored in poetic terms is the relationship or the absence of it between man and man, man and his own self and between man and the sentient world. Very rarely does the poetic self enter divine or metaphysical territory.

The 'persona' in the majority of these poems is represented by the first person 'I'. While its use is not a new technique in lyric poetry, the identity remains a matter of conjecture: is it the poet himself, or an implied voice or mask? This ambiguity is maintained in the poems analysed and the 'I' is at times the poet, the self or the persona. The most important consideration in the use of 'I' is the intrusion of autobiography in the work of art. While it is a matter of critical interest to find out an author's intentions about theme and technique, it is not the final word in interpretation. As Sivaramakrishna points out:

They are valuable as indices of the creative tension and are as such, analytic formulations of the process through which the poet acquires a
In the task of identifying the persons involved in any lyrical poem, Geoffrey N. Leech remarks:

... the I and you of a poem are frequently to be identified not with author and reader, the participants of the external situation, but rather with a pair of participants real or imaginary, which the poet has decided to call I and you for the purpose of the poem. 2

In relating 'Voice' and 'I', K. Beatty and W. H. Matchett strike a similar note of caution:

... it may be better not to call the 'I' the poet or Shakespeare, Frost or Donne. These may or may not be real experiences or even real especially in the sense of permanent attitudes. It seems best to be alert for those cases in which the poem is demonstrably a dramatic utterance or a bit of autobiography but until either is shown to be the case, to consider the voice to be that of a persona, a surrogate of the poet but neither himself in the full literal sense nor someone else. 3

In identifying the 'I' as the poet, the 'biographical snare' is difficult to avoid. In the present analysis, biographical material is used only for clarification and as affording greater insight into the poems themselves especially those dealing with the theme of alienation. Otherwise, the 'I' is invested with a universal dimension

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1 'The Last Refinement of Speech,' The Literary Criterion, 12, Nos. 2–3, 1976, p. 154.


and represents the self as man and artist with the 'autobiographical intrusion' viewed as a point of interest. It is inevitable in such poetry and is seen in the stance of either looking into oneself or looking at oneself in a mirror as a gesture of self-introspection and self-perception.

While the experience of the self is the source of artistic inspiration, these poets have objectified it in poetic terms maintaining the balance between its intense self-scrutiny and its need for community.

The artistic process which involves this journey into the regions of self is intensified by personal belief and experience. In the quest for a personal artistic integrity and self-differentiation, these artists transcend the limitations of an over-sentimental or snobbish presentation of their experiences. Only they do not rise to Yeatsian heights.

In their poetry they have attempted to reconcile the self's inborn need for individual growth and change and the compelling need for community and fellowship, for stability and security. The 'I' representing the poetic self desires to find the 'objective corelate' in this situation and as the 'personal' self also requires a similar objectification of experience. The reconciliation of the

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1 Robert Langbaum, *The Modern Spirit*, London, Chatto & Windus, 1959, pp. 172-175. Parthasarathy looks at himself in a mirror (Exile 1) and Ramakrishna gazes at himself in shop windows (Self-Portrait).
self's individuality and its feeling of community or kinship is affected largely through recollection or memory of the past in terms of the present 'I'.

Psychologists aver that 'the notion of self is the result of memory.' Memory and self are considered as two sides of the same fact and no recollection of the past is possible without its association with self. In making their poetry an 'act of memory,' Ezekiel, Ramanujan and Parthasarathy depict a wide variety of moods and postures ranging from the genuinely nostalgic happiness at recreating happy childhood experiences to the excited moods of love, and from the disenchantment of failure to the nature acceptance of life. While the deepest impulses of the self are projected, the neutral and at times ironic tone serves to mitigate the intensity of feeling. Selfhood involves pain and pleasure which as Black points out, is the "consequence of being generically human and individually a self". In recreating the past, the self sees itself in the perspective of human nature and human accomplishment and is therefore conscious of its imperfections and the need to perfect itself. These poets also see the past as a corrective to the present and thus reaffirm their belief in the value of tradition as a shaping force.


The nature of the self which is man and artist, mask and mouthpiece is unique. It is an individual personality continuing through life meeting other selves to form relationships as in the experience of love or be out of balance with other selves which again is possible in the love-experience when the self asserts its uniqueness in explosive fashion resulting in a collapse of personality. This extreme situation never arises in the case of the poets under scrutiny. The disintegration of the self is made impossible by the supreme sense of accommodation. This is evident even in the brooding dissatisfaction of the self in Parthasarathy's poetry and the critical tone in Ramanujan's. Ezekiel's poetry also does not assert the absoluteness of individuality. Even in his admirable poem, The Egoist's Prayers, self-irony, humour and deep insight into life only serve to expose the ambiguous stance of the egoist. This ambiguity or flexibility is a significant characteristic of the 'I' of these poems. The 'I' usually operates on the level of moderation and yet tries to maintain its uniqueness.

To psychologists, the self serves to link each individual to common humanity and is seen as 'id'. The personal element is identified as 'ego' and the censoring element as the 'super-ego.' In this concept of self, the poetry of Ezekiel can be characterised as the poetry of 'id,' that of Parthasarathy, the poetry of the 'ego' and that of Ramanujan, the poetry of the 'super-ego.' But 'id,' 'ego' and 'super-ego'
are manifestations of a "fundamental self which is unique yet human, personal yet universal, identifiable yet anonymous."¹ The typing of the poetry in this manner becomes too facile. It is to the advantage of the interpreter and critic to view the poetry as the poetry of the self and its experience instead of superimposing a theory of psychology and limiting the possibilities of interpretation.

In the self's movement from one posture to another, what is discernible is its basic insecurity — an all-pervading characteristic of modern life. To Michael Black, this implies relationship.² The self fears its solitude, its loneliness and needs to possess something or belong somewhere and what is manifest is the sense of dependence rather than dominance. The poetry of Ezekiel, Ramanujan and Parthasarathy shows this problem of the self—the problem of alienation and relationship. There is the reiterated need for balance which will endow the self with the necessary self-knowledge to establish fruitful relationships or accept its situation for what it is.

The recognition of many selves is part of the search for the real self. The 'I' cannot see itself in 'holistic relation' to its own self or to the world. In recent times, with the strongly marked introspective trend in poetry, the self is more aware of its fragmentation. The crisis of

¹ Black, p. 32.
² Black, p. 13.
self-division' which Miyoshi calls as 'endemic to Victorian
times' becomes a vibrant theme of contemporary poetry also. 1

The problem for the self is to recognize its identity
in its role as man and artist. R.P. Warren observes that
"only in so far as the work establishes and expresses a self
can it engage us." 2 The poetry of the self becomes an act of
self-criticism arising from self-awareness and leading to
greater self-knowledge. The constant rationalizing and
intellectualizing of experience by the self in order to
achieve a rapport with its own self and its milieu has
resulted in the neutral tone of many of the poems. Whatever
the theme, the need for integration is felt. The dilemma of
the self is partially resolved in acceptance and
accommodation through self-irony and awareness of the
community.

The conscious pursuit of poetry makes the self
communicate with other selves by crystallizing its experience
in art form. Ezekiel and Parthasarathy and in a lesser way
A.K. Ramanujan are sensitively aware of their vocation and
even make poetry the theme of their poems. 3 The poems embody
"the experience of the self vis-a-vis the world not merely
as subject-matter but as translated into the experience of
form which represents not only a manipulation of the world,

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3 In this they can be compared to the Movement Poets.
but an adventure in selfhood."

In the voyage of self-discovery, the self manifests itself in different roles as mask or alter ego. Sometimes it adopts a fabular role (as in Ted Hughes' *Crow*) or a shadowy persona of the literal self. Its identity thus remains elusive and the relation of the self to the work created continues to be a fascinating and complex problem in literary interpretation.

That the self is both self-protective and communicative is evident in its movement from alienation to community. In confessional poetry, however, its neurosis prevents rational communication. The emphasis is not merely on the alienated nature of the self but its power to alienate:

The self is a shell, it puts people off from others; it is resistant to the needs and natures of others. Insidiously, it protects that isolation, it will not be open and will not grow or change.

A salient feature of the poetry of the self of these Indian poets is the absence of the neurotic strain. The self participates in tearing off its self-protective armour and confronts reality. It seeks to destroy its isolation and rectify past errors. This positive and healthy trend makes the poetry more meaningful and mature without the violence and sporadic brilliance of the confessional mode. The self

1 R. P. Warren, p. 69.
2 Michael Block.
3 Michael Block, p. 46.
does not want to intensify its loneliness. Even in alienation, it sees the need for community and moves towards it to prevent self-annihilation. The poetry can be seen as a series of constructive moves from a state of alienation to that of community and fellowship through love. This reaching across to others is effected by breaking real or imagined self-created barriers.

The identity of the self however remains an elusive condition of being in spite of its similar postures. In Nissim Ezekiel's poetry, the self is in quest of a human identity sans Jewishness or Indianness, Parthasarathy's is in the discovery of the self as a 'cultural achievement' synthesising English and Brahminic traditions and Ramanujan's is the autonomous identity of the self without affiliation to family or tradition. Their commonalty lies in the integrity of their vision and their belief in a human identity that is authentic and meaningful. This is what makes possible the cyclical movement from alienation to community with love as a temporary haven.