CHAPTER – I
INTRODUCTION

Generally it is said that literature is that a mirror of life reflections at different times different activities related to life. It is the turn of Indian English literature which holds the mirror reflecting the lives, attitudes, aspirations, the likes and dislikes of people who live in different walks of life. As long as literature does this purposeful act, it will definitely stand up to the test of time and as a result, millions of people coming afterward will have the opportunity to take a leaf out of those pages written in the distant past. In this context it is fitting enough to quote the following memorable lines from K.R Srinivasa Iyengar in his introduction to Indian Writing in English.

"One touch of Nature makes the whole world kin, but it is in literature that the heart-beats of a nation are heard, and it is through the medium of a commonly inspired and shared literature that we can exchange pulses as it were and realize that, while the differences are on the surface, the sense of unity flows as in an underground river and we duly receive the baptism of rebirth into the fellowship of a human faith". (1985:1-2)
In the 20th and 21st centuries human values are given the go-by. Modernization, mechanization and globalization of the present situation murder the human practices. The worldly pleasure occupies the place of human tendency, which loses its vigor for the sake of money. The globe of yesteryears witnessed several Wars namely the World War I, the World War II, the Vietnam War etc., The contemporary world witnesses the Gulf War, the Afghanistan War and the terrorists striking at the very root of what has been established in the form of welfare for people. The Indians are affected by unemployment and under-employment, and they do not get enough food to eat. Natural calamites, such as earthquake, drought, make a man restless and go without food and lose happiness.

In this prevailing scenario it is important to analyze the human problems and possible solutions to them. These problems are examined and analyzed by the "humanists" M.H.Abrams defines the term 'humanists' in his book *A Glossary of Literary Terms* thus:

"In our time the term 'humanists' often connotes those thinkers who base truth on human experience and reason and base values on human nature and culture as distinct from those who regard religious revelation as the warrant for all truth and values" (2000:117)
But in the 16th century the term ‘humanists’ signifies one who taught or worked in the ‘humanities’ such as rhetoric, history, poetry, grammar, and moral philosophy. It is differentiated from the area of knowledge less concerned with the moral and imaginative aspects and activities of man, that is natural philosophy, mathematics and theology. These subjects deal with the classical and cultural matters.

In the 19th century, a new term ‘humanists’ was coined and applied to refer to the view of human nature, the general values and educational notions common to many Renaissance humanists. The Renaissance of humanism states the importance of human beings. It emphasizes human life. The humanist focuses the need for a rounded development of an individual’s diverse powers—physical, mental, artistic and moral. In this century the humanists accelerate the base of truth on human experience and reason and fundamental values on human nature and culture. It is different from religious revelation and it is related to philanthropy.

Today’s humanists are materialists rather than idealists. This kind of tendency must change their view and policy. It lies in the legitimate conscience of the people regarding their rights. The common fault on humanism is unable to give an ethical system based on the great religions. The theological belief and sense compels the people to do the right attitude only, but the humanists must
give up their secret and unconscious worries about God and supernatural conventions. The traditional habits are but a guide to follow the virtues of the past in human life. It is important to formulate a general rule to cover the individual differences. George Sampson rightly observes in his book *The Concise Cambridge History of English Literature*:

"Prophecy is as dangerous in literary matters as in political, and in this instance they may well be connected, but we are running no great risk of having to eat our English words when we say that literature in the English language is likely to become more and more cosmopolitan the further the twentieth century proceeds towards its own manifest destiny in the twenty-first. The accent-or the varying accents-of late-twentieth-century English literature is hardly likely to be less so"

(1965:841)

The literary criticism of the literature of a period can better be understood, if it is studied against the backdrop of race, milieu and moment – the social and intellectual ideas and philosophical background prevalent in the 20th century Indo-Anglian poetry. It is true of the literature of the 20th century rather than of any other age because here the artists responded to the challenge of the unprecedented explosion of knowledge in all spheres of human activities – sociology, anthropology, psychology, psychoanalysis economics, philosophy,
science – by trying to successfully incorporate this knowledge in the realm of art. Its net result has been to increase the awareness of the universe.

The endeavor would be to discuss the development that took place in various spheres of human activity, resulting in a complete change in attitudes and values, systems and to show how these changes are reflected in the 20th century Indo-Anglian poetry. It is different from the poems of earlier centuries, and also it provides an illustration of the ultimate in its departure from the most tenaciously held attitudes of the Victorians. This process of inquiry and rejection started with the advent of the century.

There could be seen innumerable cracks that had already appeared in the metaphysical, social, psychological and moral edifice, created by the Victorians. The publication of Darwin's *The Origin of Species* in 1850 gave a blow to the conception of man as a being created by God in his own image. The moment man ceased to be a creation of God and came to be recognized as a stage, the process of evolution, the whole edifice of morality and metaphysics crumbled down. This change of concept of nature of man and experience had its concomitant impact on the concept of the nature of reality. As a result of developments, in different branches of knowledge, the 20th century literature reflects a departure from and at times indeed, a complete break with the major issues and concerns of the Victorian writers. The writer now no longer seems to
be interested in society. The emphasis falls on the individual with the dissolution of familiar boundaries – of religious, moral, social and philosophical beliefs – the writers show an uncommon degree of predilection for the individual and his dilemma.

Another significant aspect of the 20th century literature is that it is pervaded by the spirit of uncertainty, restlessness, anxiety and confusion, W.B Yeats's agonized cry in his poem entitled 'The Second Coming'

"Things fall apart; the center cannot hold;

Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world"

is both a confirmation of this spirit and a recognition of the lack of a centripetal unifying body of belief. The themes of alienation, of rootlessness, uncertainty, and restlessness of religious crisis of the very fundamental attitudes relating to the existence of man of rebellion, of the individual against all kinds of established concepts and notions of disgust with authority, of desperate attempts on the part of the individual to carve out an identity for himself, of contempt for the 'absolutes' of a fierce striving on the part of individual to save himself from turning into an automation, etc., find expression in the 20th century writers. This tremendous change in the subject matter in respect of major issues and themes, concerns and preoccupations necessitated a corresponding change in form and technique. In the 20th century truth changed. As change is inevitable
everywhere 'beauty' also changes, that is why, modern literature is so different, so new, so compelling and so challenging. In some ways India is a state having its own distinct place in the world today. Its diversity of cultures and its civilizations have greatly appealed to the Europeans and a substantial literature testifies to the fascination of the East.

Nissim Ezekiel, one among the post-Independence Indian poets in English, is a multifaceted genius. He studied philosophy under Joad in England. Though he is from Israel, his interests channeled out into diverse fields as theatre, arts, cinema, psychology and Indian culture, his creative zeal was always alive, and Ezekiel possessed the remarkable equanimity to accept life for what it is. This type of quality characterizes his poetic vision too and he seems to have imbibed the traditional Hindu acceptance of life and the existential philosophy of the significance of the contemporary life. At the beginning of his life Ezekiel realized that his roots were in the Indian soil. Since there were various shifts in life his accent has always been on creative writing pursuits.

Ezekiel's first volume of poems *A Time To Change* (1952) heralds the significant movement from the romantic to the realistic kind of poem. It contains his most forward-looking and passionate work. Indianness is the most vital component of Ezekiel's poetry. His search for self is, in the solid content of the other self, which is given recognizable sociological, economic, religious
and traditional dimensions. His puzzled emotional reaction to the modern Indian dilemmas, the poignant conflicts of tradition and modernism, the city and the village makes his poetry a poetic chronicle of the period in which he writes.

In Sixty Poems (1953) many of the poems re-enact in a disarmingly simple manner the Indian lifestyle. The poems on a variety of themes like love, death, loneliness, prayer, testify to the prodigality of poetic imagination. The poems reveal that his art is in a state of flux and he is experimenting with various rhythm and rhyme patterns and moving towards free verse. Ezekiel visualizes life in all its variety without its violence and glamour. The neutrality of style adopted by him contributes to a certain unity. Ezekiel touched upon many themes in his third volume The Third (1959) Portrait and Declaration is an ample evidence of the growing maturity of the poet.

Ezekiel did his most honest and lyrical best in his slim volume of poems The Unfinished Man (1959). In this collection, all poems move with grace and dignified ease. It is seen in each poem. Ezekiel's versatile craftsmanship is obvious in every one of them. There is to be seen a concreteness and definiteness of images and also subtle irony in his poetry.

In The Exact name (1965) of Ezekiel, the search is for precision and lucidity, the wish for the word to the thing itself. The main theme of the poems
is the darkest myths, which do not lead to light. The poems are intellectually complex and austere in acceptance.

The sixth volume of Ezekiel’s poetry *Hymns in Darkness* (1976) is his most fully projected and realized work. It is a proof of his versatility as a poet in the brilliant total variation of the poems. The style is loaded with meaning and the poems stand, as a criticism of life *Latter Day Psalms* is Ezekiel’s most recent volume of poems.

A.K. Ramanujan is considered as the most gifted and the most individual of contemporary Indian poets. His poems communicate with complete ease an Indian sensibility. He was a Professor of Dravidian Studies in the United States of America. He has published four volumes of poetry namely *The Striders* (1966), *Relations* (1967) *Second Sight* (1986) and *The Black Hen* (1995). He won his reputation as an excellent translator from Tamil and Kannada into English. *The Interior Landscape* is a translation of Tamil poems into English. The past is the source of inspiration of many of Ramanujan’s poems. His memory traces the past incidents and situations in his poems. Ramanujan makes them a vehicle of the criticism of the self and environs in terms of the tradition-modernity conflict. Though the vision is fragmented it is possible to trace such themes as self-alienation, love, and family.
The family is central to Ramanujan’s poetry. The ills of the family especially its materialism and lack of unity gives a sharp edge to his poetry. His poetry reflects the poetic self’s predicament, intellectual and social predicament. He fuses the essential Indian sensibility and the temper of modernity with a great deal of skill. Ramanujan’s poetry owns the richness of the past experience and it reveals the consciousness of the poetic self. His Indianism helps to develop a framework with the identities of the self which could be presented in their complexity. To Ramanujan, the problems of life and poetry are one and the same. He unites a single poetic structure or life-memory as the past, memory as the present and memory as the future.

R.Parthasarathy is another the great poetic genius among the Indo-Anglian poets. He studied Linguistics at Leeds University. He published Rough Passage, which is the unique book of verse with a three-tier structure “Exile”, “Trial”, and “Home-coming”. All the poems in the Rough Passage form part of a single poem. It should be considered and read as one poem. P.K.J Kurup wrote in his Contemporary Indian Poetry in English

“Like A. K Ramanujan, R. Parthasarathy also concerns his poetry with the consciousness of the need for regaining roots in myth and tradition. As with Ramanujan, Parthasarathy’s starting point for the quest of identity is his felt sense of exile and the dynamic force behind
the quest is active engagement between two cultures, Indian and western. But in Parthasarathy's case he greatly concerns his poetry with the necessity to regain his identity through the discovery of his language as a creative mode." (1991:243)

The poems in "Rough Passage" attempt to resolve the tension in the poet's mind. The conflict between Indian and English cultures is the vital force behind Parthasarathy's poetry.

Current Indo-Anglian poetry is classifiable into work that is concerned chiefly with technical experiment, such as that represented in the bright, glittering vowels, consonants and rhyme –schemes of poets and work that deal chiefly with introspection and self-discovery, represented by them. Nissim Ezekiel is one of contemporary Indian poets, because he is the most consistent in maintaining a happy balance between experiment in technique and introspective urge. Occasionally the balance is replaced by a fusion and the result is memorable poem. In his slim collection of poems called 'A Time To Change' there is no more misleading title as an introduction to his poetry. There is no notion of change in these poems, no change in the sense of the poet moving from the development of one idea into another. It is like a wheel with the spokes, centering on a hub; or the flow water. He possesses a great awareness of serenity. His poems revolve like moth around the bright
flame. Though the flame takes many shapes, its essence constitutes a simple and harmonious way of life, where the mind is free from vexation as far as possible and the body contented with elementary satisfaction.

Ezekiel looks forward to a third new world in the poem ‘Something to Pursue’, to his brother Joe, who made it possible, where,

“There shall be no more question,
No more expenditure of doubt,
But only a limped style of life,
Whose texture is poetry”(1989:18)

Different people in different strata have different conceptions of what constitute a happy life; that is precisely what Ezekiel implies by deliberately refraining from a phrase like “the happy life” A ‘limpid’ style of life can have in it elements that may lead to occasional happiness; it may also have elements which lead to occasional unhappiness.

The limpid style of life is a lucid and unprejudiced look into one’s faults; a broader sense of humanity; a discipline of silence; self-possession; spiritual penance; sensitivity to the light and lovely pleasure the innocent world provides, but it is chiefly a ruthless, sincere simplification. It keeps passion
toning it down to affection; keeps a sense of sin, but does not allow it to lacerate the heart; keeps discipline more in the form of a level head than thin-lipped rigidity; and retain a simple and fresh delight in the simple and fresh attractions.

The Indian-English writers provide in their works pictures of life and manners of their own people, historical background and geography of their regions. The national and specific features, as a matter of fact, tell on the manner of understanding things. As Nafi Djusoity, a Soviet literary critic puts it in his essay “On the National Language and National Style”, “The national in the form of an artistic work is primarily related not to the peculiarities of the national language, but in the specific national style” (1957:179).

A distinguishing feature of all the Indian-English writers is the fact that tutored in British school during their childhood, they were on similar lines brought up at home in the sprits of national traditions and their creative works are inseparably bound up with these traditions. Every one of them experienced the influence of verbal national art, to which he himself belongs, be it through mother’s stories of Anand, grandmother’s fairy tales of Narayan or the recitation of wandering minstrels of Bhattacharya and unforgettable legends of storytellers like Raja Rao. In the works of everyone of these, a direct relationship with the folklore is present.
The rift moves Nissim Ezekiel. He bluntly highlights the loss of poetic sensibility in the modern world. He eloquently summarizes the degenerate state of modern India. Nissim Ezekiel and A.K. Ramanujan have employed a language of intellectual analysis, the early Ezekiel rather like a neo-classical wit, Ramanujan a latter-day metaphysical to reflect on their emotional states. The Indo-Anglian poets of the nineteenth century recollected their emotions almost in futility. Ramanujan’s poetry at its best is notable for his manner of conceiving and sharply delineating an image. His poem ‘Self-Portrait’ reveals the poet contemplating his reflection. This is an economical, imaginative example of what the Indian English poems can offer an outsider: a universal movement of self-recognition. The poem is textually self-sufficient as a culturally anonymous statement.

However, in the context of Ramanujan’s numerous family poems, or of a comparison with Parthasarathy’s Rough Passage, it can discern behind “Self Portrait” knowledge of continuity, of the deterministic pleasure of father-identification, which instinctively bears the importance of Indian familial experience. His description of the Vacana as a “genre of epigram and lyre” which includes esoteric riddle poems notable for their ambiguous cipher language cryptography, paradox, double meaning and analogies is also applicable to a type of short modern poem which, since Pound, has been very popular in America and Britain. Some of Ramanujan’s own short poems, like
the epigrams and cameo observations that comprise “Excerpts from a Father’s wisdom” have Vacana-like traits. In Ramanujan’s poem “Which reminds me”,”Love poem for a Wife 2”, Some Indian Uses of History on Rainy Day”, and “Prayers to Lord Murugan” the play of metaphor and symbol almost presupposes, in the spirit of the Vacana, a secret doctrine or key external to the poem. His poems testify as much to an Indian habit of mind as it does to the influence of literary technique derived from the west. The four categories of poetic expression namely Influence, Indianness, Language and Identity, which are the core areas of Indian English-Language poetry are greatify discernible in the texture of Ramanujan’s poetry.

Apart from the creatively utilized influences and examples of psychological and thematic Indianness Ramanujan, who is by profession a Dravidian philologist, has evolved a personal pliant English, which retains its normal power of rational analysis. The cultural and private ramification of Indianness and Identity in conjunction is the subject of R.Parthasarathy’s sequence Rough passage. The passage is comprised of numerous to and from excursions between past and present, India and the West, psychologically as well as physically. Rough Passage is in three sections: ‘Exile’ which explores the impact of the west on India, and personal development; ‘Trial’ which examines the connections between sexual love and individuation; and ‘Home coming’ in which the England-returned protagonist seeks to find and assimilate
his cultural roots. Such is the intensity of introspection behind and in *Rough passage* that a curious marriage between clinical detachment and emotional nakedness occurs in the form of the poem. Three line-stanzas prevail throughout, the poet avoids long and complex sentences, the language is sparse, precise and is without over-statement and yet the poem as an entity almost reeks of feeling, a feeling of painful Indianness; throbs with sensibility belonging to the culture into which it was born.

The danger an Indian writer can face in confronting his Indianness or identity problems with thoroughness akin to Parthasarathy’s, is that a sentiment of world-weariness can all but consume the writer’s power of perception or his protagonist’s capacity to live, at least on the page. Once the writer succumbs to this sentiment what usually results is an uncritical, self-indulgent sentimentalizing, soul-searching obsession with his Indianness. Parthasarathy makes the conscious effort to return to ‘his own tongue’. He uses an idiom that proves in fact that he is totally at home in his medium.

The steady appearance of critical literature on Indo-Anglian writing brings the reassurance that this species is coming to be recognized as an independent entity deserving serious critical attention. Its explicit aim is that of comparing and contrasting the experience, the tone and the manner of the three major poets, namely Nissim Ezekiel, A.K.Ramanujan, and R.Parthasarathy.
Firstly, it deals with the poet’s attitude towards common and the ordinary in human existence with particular emphasis on low key of their tone. It also explores the intellectual treatment of the serious and the uncommon; it also examines the poet’s treatment of the non-serious in a comic manner. This study brings out the poet’s essential consciousness of the urban milieu, and their approach to love.

A comparison of Ramanujan and Parthasarathy reveals not just a similar poetic treatment underlying their craft and vision, but also marked likeness at the level of Indian sensibility-coolness, detachment. Objectivity are the marks of Ezekiel’s harsher notations of Indian life. Nissim Ezekiel’s work calls to mind a remark of George Santhyana in his book _The Life of Reason or the Passes of Human Progress_: “Art supplies constantly to contemplation what nature seldom efforts concrete experience the union of life and peace” (1905: 174) Parthasarathy like Nissim Ezekiel is totally without what swelling euphoria of the late romantic tradition as it manifested itself among nineteenth century poetic Indians. A kind of melancholy is common to them both, calmer in Ezekiel more than in Parthasarathy. His naturalness and honesty of feeling are helped by his delicate skill in managing an idiomatic and unpretentiously modern line and voice. Ramanujan’s poetry is intimate, concrete, and dismissive of anything puffy or obese, and it brings into the Indian literary scene a
welcome note of confident, individual and independent voice. His images are sharp in content and outline.

From divine literature the humanist deliberately alters the focus of intellectual and moral concern. They emphasize a new, scholarly philosophy of life. The Renaissance humanism was practically a glorification of human life on the planet, of material prosperity, success and comfort. They placed their emphasis on man, as he is revealed in the written records, intellectual and imaginative. They discussed questions like the dignity of man, the conditions and possibilities of happiness in human efforts and ability to contact it.

In the succeeding chapters an account of the poetic features in the three selected Indo-Anglian poets, namely Nissim Ezekiel, A.K.Ramanujan and R.Parthasarathy has been traced.