CHAPTER III

TRENDS IN POST-1960 INDIAN POETRY IN ENGLISH
Post-1960 Indian Poetry in English has acquired certain distinct qualities which set it apart from the poetry of Pre-Independent India. Indian poetry in English in the nineteen sixties and after, is a part of political, social, economic and intellectual upheaval in India. This poetry has variety, novelty and its typical products are in smooth, simple and matter of fact diction, intelligible to the general readers. The post-1960 Indian English poets are conscious artists 'looking before and after'. In their desire to strike a new note in Indian poetry in English they set aside their predecessors like Toru Dutt, Sarojini Naidu and Sri Aurobindo. Nissim Ezekiel, A.K. Ramanujan, Shiv K. Kumar, R. Parthasarathy, Keki N. Daruwalla, O.P. Bhatnagar, Kamala Das, Gauri Deshpande, Gauri Pant, Lila Ray, Monika Varma, and Margaret Chatterjee are all explorers both of the outer world and of the inner world, their feet firmly planted on the ground and yet their minds forever seeking new pastures. They are realistic poets who have felt the pulse of the people. They move with the time. Hence in their poetry lotus, cuckoo, flowers have made room for scorpions, art, philosophy, Pablo Neruda, Jemin Roy, sex, women, carnage in Colombo and a hundred things which they see everyday in contemporary life and existence.
Post-1960 Indian poets in English have overcome the momentic nostalgia for the past and begun to see the world with all its ('boredom and horror' devoid of glory. They take the world as it is and make their poetry out of the contemporary situation. This trend leads to a search for identity and 'Indianness' in their poetry. The search for identity becomes all the more urgent in the context of multi-lingual and multi-cultural situation in India. Contemporary living both in the country and abroad has attracted the attention of these poets and they have described the contemporary society in unmistakable terms. Politics, exploitation, search for roots, and above all a sense of obsession with 'Indianness' become prime themes of post-1960 Indian Poetry in English which set the trend for the poetry of the last three decades.

Like religion in the past, politics dominates the contemporary life of man. The social man today cannot be separated from the political. If politics has dominated human life today it is because of the contemporary situation in which it plays a vital part. In fact, politics has become a mode of life with us. Post-1960 Indian poets in English have raised their voices against injustice in the society either at home or abroad. Politics has become a metaphor for poetry in the hands of some of our well known Indian poets in English. O.P. Bhatnagar is one such poet. Bhatnagar has set a trend in this direction. His poem, 'Thoughts on
Election Day in India* dives deep into the election process and brings forth the defects in the system which makes the democratic process futile and its continuance ridiculous. With a vast majority of our population being illiterate, the voting pattern becomes an uncertainty and we hope in vain for 'new political miracles' in every Election. As Bhatnagar puts it:

The ignorant voters in their routine
Queue up day-dreaming
And in a passion of a second
Get rid of their Oscitant indecision
Stamping symbols for men,
With a handful of literates
Sealing literate favours in steel boxes
And recording the proud percentage of poll
A quiet reigns over the polling booths
like mourners retired from their obsequies.

Election seems to be increasingly irrelevant, with the passage of time because it fails miserably to fulfill the hopes and aspirations of our people. The sense of patriotism and sacrifice have now made room for selfishness and lust for power. The earlier love for the country has vanished in no time and the new rulers have become self-centred with the intoxication of power and authority. As the poet tells us,

He has got into power with salmy ease
Acquiring property, shares and xirthes new
The total is more than an illusion

('The Peacock')

Our hard-fawn freedom in the hands of these corrupt and incompetent politicians lost most of its meaning and vitality. We are sacrificed to their vanity and greed. We merely inhabit the land and the country belongs to those who rule us. Thus the poet regrets:
Before the British Came
The land was not ours
After they left
It was not ours too
The land belongs
To those who rule

(The No Man's land)

The dichotomy between what the present day politicians preach and practise is brilliantly brought home by Shiv K. Kumar in his poem entitled, "Epitaph on an Indian politician":

Vasectomized of all genital urges  
for love and beauty  
he often crossed floors  
as his wife leaped across beds  
In his kitchen garden he grew  
Only tongues and lungs  
to blow into fragile mikes  
Powerful harangues  
half-conceived in haste  
All his life he shambled around  
in homespun yarn  
Socializing his soul,  
While his sons flourished  
in the private sector of big business.

The picture is accurate and what saves the poem from mere documentation is the choice of poetic diction and a sense of humour tinged with soothing irony. This portrayal of an Indian politician is very successful as it evokes a kind of response from the readers for they have encountered such politicians in everyday life.

Shifting of responsibility and turning a deaf ear to the spirit of law, the authorities try to explain away things. It is due to the callousness of the appropriate officials and the bottle neck created by the so-called democratic system in the administration of the country people suffer disproportionately to their cime. Thus it
is not law and justice that have failed us but we have failed them. Nissim Ezekiel examines the cases of under-trial prisoners and puts the record straight in a poem entitled, "Undertrial Prisoners":

We have our rules
made long ago
he's got to wait,
the law says so.
It's not our fault
he lives in jail
He did something wrong
and he can't pay bail.
Thousands like him
Who did something wrong
five years ago or may be ten
they don't know when
they were offered bail
but didn't have the money
so they live in jail
I have shown you, friends,
how justice meets its ends
A crime is a crime:
the law must take its time.

The Post-1960 Indian poets in English are sensitive to the stresses and challenges of their world - a world of screaming headlines and double dealings. They are determined to come to grips with the real problems of the day - political, social and economic. They try to catch the public ear with 'a poetry of popular impersonation':

1 (G.S. Freser's coinage) trying to imitate the talks of Indian politicians, clerks, reporters, Professors, officials and so on. Here they seem to be ultramodern and are more susceptible to experiment and innovation because they are not burdened with a past. And the history of Indo-English poetry in the sixties and after is partly the history of an escape from Toru Dutta.
Sarojini Naidu and Sri Aurobindo and of the search for the 'Indianness' of Indo-English poetry. In order to cultivate 'Indianness' in their poetry, they adopt various methods, and that in a way sets trends in their poetry.

'Poetry of popular impersonation' is a trend of post-1960 Indian Poetry in English. Nissim Ezekiel, R. Parthasarathy and Keki N. Daruwalla are great exponents of this trend. R. Parthasarathy's "Incident at Ahmedpore Station: A letter" makes an attempt to impersonate the tone of a half-educated Indian Passenger with his typical use of Indianized English words. The poem should be quoted in full to make the illustration clear:

I am arrive by passenger train at Ahmedpore Station and my belly is too much swelling
With jack fruit I am therefore went to privy
Just as a I doing the nuisance
that guard making whistle blow for train to go off,
and I am running with lota in one hand
and dhoti in the next, when I am fall over
and expose all my shocking
to men, women on platform.
I am get leaved at Ahmedpore Station.
This too much bad, if passenger go to make dung
that damn guard no wait train five minutes for him.
I am therefore pray your honour
to make big fine on that guard for public sake,
Otherwise I am making big report to papers.

This is a typical poem on the use of Indian English by half-educated Indians. The situation is quite funny and yet true. Nissim Ezekiel's poems like "Good bye Party for Miss Pushpa T. S", 'The Railway Clerk', 'Hangover', 'Very Indian Poem in Indian English' 'Touching', 'Family' and 'The Professor' are typical examples of 'Poetry of Popular impersonation'.

'Indianness' of Indo-English Poetry is an extremely complex matter to be defined, though post-1960 Indian Poets in English vye with each other to show this trait in their poetry. In the course of an article, Nissim Ezekiel explains: 'I must confess at this point that I have often personally longed for it, tracked it down slowly in ardent hope of smelling it, upto the nearest spiritual perfume-manufacturing unit, stretched my soul in libraries, classrooms and even correspondence courses in Indian culture; carried out exercises in direct observation of poverty and affluence, urban and rural modes of living; perceived and assimilated all things Indian wherever they could be found, in India and abroad, till I am 'a part of it' as I once wrote, 'to be observed by foreigners'. And I realise now that there is no single Indian flavour which alone can claim the designation and that its value, too, depends on a host of generative factors which should never be simplified for purposes of praise or blame. It should, in any case, not be considered the decisive factor in assessing the worth of anything of Indian origin, including Indo-English Poetry'.

In order to understand 'Indianness' of Indo-English Poetry, one should turn to A.K. Ramanujan's 'Selected Poems' published in 1976. Even the titles of some poems suggest a direct statement on this subject, such as 'A Hindu to his Body', 'The Hindoo: he does not hurt a fly, or a spider either', 'Some Indian Uses of History on a Rainy Day', 'Small town,
South India 'Old Indian Belief' and the sequence called 'Prayers to Lord Murugan'. The clue to the search of 'Indianness' lies in introspection. This gives rise to introspective poetry. A.K.Ramanujan after his long stay in U.S.A. has produced a good deal of introspective poetry. His poetry is a kind of enactment of encounter between two cultures, one ancient and the other modern, each illuminating the other. The 'self' sees itself in the other. In order to renew contacts with his roots, he scans, as it were, the pages of family history. Family is the objective correlative of his poetry, which led R.Parthasarathy, a contemporary poet to remark: 'The family for Ramanujan, is one of the central metaphors with which he thinks'. Ramanujan's poems on and about family life include poems about his parents, two poems ('Love Poem for a wife 1' and 'Love Poem for a wife 2') about his wife and poems in joint family system such as, 'On the very possible Jaundice of an Unborn Daughter', 'A leaky Tap after a sister's wedding', 'Looking for a cousin on a swing', 'History' and 'Small Scale Reflections on a Great House'. In the last mentioned poem the poet tells us in a modest way how people fall in line, how it is impossible to escape the family, the Great House. He does not, however, accept its inevitability. There is a note of protest, though subdued, against the house. Therefore the poet (persona) is uneasy in the stifling environment of the 'house'. In fact, the word 'great' is ironic - the joint Hindu family which forms the subject matter of the
poem is in no way 'great'. Here identities are lost, sallowed
up in the great mass of the family. As the poet puts it:

Sometimes I think that nothing
that ever comes into this house
goes out. Things come in everyday
to lose themselves among other things
lost long ago among
other things lost long ago;

lame wandering cows from nowhere
have been known to be tethered,
given a name, encouraged
to get pregnant in the broad daylight
of the street under the elders'
supervision, the girls hiding
behind windows with holes in them.

There is no qualm about its proliferation and the devastating
implication of 'lame' and 'encouraged' are not missed upon
us. And line 13, underscores the nature of false world - the
Great House. The sexual image in that line assumes greater
significance in the context of the subject - family. The
children are not blessed into the family and there is no
joy of birth. There is no sanctity in man-woman relationship
and instead, there is vulgarity (to get pregnant in the
broad daylight of the street under the elder's supervision).

In nutshell, the poem constitutes an exposor of the Great
House, the joint Hindu family.

Ramanujan's poems are primarily memory poems more
concerned with the stream of thought. Process in which one
memory is interlaced with the other, than the actual objects
and people who are connected with it. In "love poem for a
wife I", the estrangement of wife and husband is viewed in
terms of their 'unshared childhood', which prompts the poet
to use reminiscence and evoke the Indian landscape more in
terms of the people to whom these memories are specifically
related. Some of Ramanujan's well known poems such as 'The Hindoo he does not hurt a Fly', 'The Hindoo: he reads Gita', 'The Hindoo: the only Risk' and 'Conventions of Despair' underline the conventional attitudes which the Hindus are supposed to project. In the words of Devindra Kohli, "For example, since they believe in re-incarnation, the possibility that a fly or a spider may be a re-incarnation of human being, or even of one's relative should prevent anyone from hurting it. But for Ramanujan, once the procession of memories starts and the poet's imagination darts back and forth in time in search of the personally relevant images, he is no longer concerned with re-incarnation as a philosophical concept but with the reenactment of the human passions which such speculation may lay bare. The Hindu may read his Gita but his cultivated detachment and self-denial may prove effectual when confronted by the ancient fear of death."

The sense of introspection looking within and down the memory-lane is central to Ramanujan's poetry. He makes an attempt in 'Conventions of Despair' to steer clear of the two dangers: the danger of modernism with its intellectual jargon, and asceticism with its spiritual vocabulary the first being too unconventional, and the second because it whores the present moment for the imaginary profits of a colourful future. Ramanujan's memory is the storehouse of all that he has seen, heard, touched and smelt in his life—nothing important is forgotten. Thus while writing poetry
he not only depends on memory but makes use of it. In a word, he particularizes from memory. 'Obituary', which has been occasioned by his father's death, is absolutely realistic and deeply moving. After observing all the formalities that are associated with the dead, including an obituary column in an obscure corner of a newspaper, the poem settles down with the following conclusion:

And he left us
a changed mother
and more than
one annual ritual.

Most of Ramanujan's poems in Relations bear the imprint of his personal emotion and they deal with his memory of his relations and the kind of freedom that life away from them confers. This theme is made explicit in the epigraph-poem, a translation from Tamil:

Like a haunted deer
On the wide white
Salt land,
a flayed hide
turned inside out,
one may run,
escape.
But living
among relations
binds the feet.

An awareness of the contemporary situation and the sad memory of partition of India in 1947 and the violence at that time continue to haunt the minds of Indian English Poets. Shiv K.Kumar's latest volume of poems, Trapfalls in the Sky (1986) contains some poems on this theme. In a poem called 'O Delhi!' Shiv K.Kumar nostalgically harks back
to the past and recalls the violence that vitiated the atmosphere in the wake of partition. Thus Kumar says,

An aeon ago, I joined a caravan of exiles, snail-paced across a continent to pitch my tent on your outskirts—

It was a frigid morning, the Sun bundled up in a grey shawl of mist, the breeze probing the bone’s marrow. Still I felt redeemed as you threw open your gates—Kashmir and Ajmeri—to welcome indoors a fugitive from another land. ('O, Delhi!')

The plight of the refugees is brought home in a poem called 'Refugees'. Kumar employs the image of the 'yoked bulls' to describe the plight of the refugees.

Between the nest’s gloved warmth and the vision of a perch beyond the river-bend they limp through dark spaces.

Blinkered like yoked bulls, burdened with ancestral memories, they trudge on, counting the milestones which look like mained tombstones while the time’s womb hold out only a still born.

('Refugees')

Another significant poet, O.P. Bhatnagar puts aptly the predicament of modern man in his surroundings of our time.

I live in a languid sublimity of suffering with tyranny, exploitation and rapes, mixed with prayers, philosophy and fasts cocktailed in an antelögy of existence served both by the farseeing politicians and bourgeois saints to make me forget my pains but the frame of my misery hasn’t much changed.

('The Still Questions')
This is further borne out in another poem called 'Displacement more Spacious than Space'. Bhatnagar asks:

Any place for me in this over populated country
Of Gods, Saints, leaders and martyrs?
The communally, it seems, is just meant
To bleat like goats.
Like all wavelengths absorbed I am white
All spaces lost I am a refugee.

Whether at home or abroad, injustice and violence
catch the attention of the poets. Deeply shocked at the
Wanton Killings of men, women and children of Tamil origin
Kamala Das questions the very rationale of this senseless action and wanton killings in her poem 'Carnage in Colombo' (published in 'The Illustrated Weekly of India' October 2, 1983 P.36). The poem is in two parts: a) 'Smoke in Colombo' and b) 'The Sea at Galle Face Green' and needs to be quoted at some length to illustrate the poet's deep anguish over the Tamil genocide:

On that last ride home we had the smoke
Following us..............
.............................
.............................
They stopped us, a somnambulistic
Daze was in their eyes, there was no space
Between us and their guns, but we were
Too fatigued to feel fear, or resist
The abrupt moves
Of an imbecilic will.

('Smoke in Colombo')

Like a half-burnt corpse was
That once splendid city
Its maimed limbs turned towards
The Smoke-stained sky; and
.............................
.............................
.............................
How did they
Trackdown the little ones
Who knew not their ethnic
Inferiority?
The city was grey
And every window was
shut. Fear was in the air
As the corpses smouldered
Fear and a stench sweet as
That of raw cashewnuts,
Roasting. The sea did its
Duty as usual at
The Galle Face Green, without
A Sign of fear, without
A sign of shock or pain
It patrolled the empty shore.

('The Sea at Galle Face Green')

Not only the poet resents the violence, wholesale destruction and killing of innocent children but she also disapproves of the sea's usual course of action for not sympathising with the unfortunate victims. While narrating a harrowing experience, Kamala Das has chosen words from Psychology very carefully but here there is no negative capability as Keats would have imagined. Nevertheless it is a very competent poem on a burning ethnic issue in Sri Lanka.

O.P. Bhatnagar's 'Look, Homeward Angel' is a very successful poem on a current problem namely, 'brain-drain'. With the curiosity of an artist, the keenness of an intellectual and insight of a critic, Bhatnagar observes the vital problem of brain drain in our country and reflects on the situation. The very title of the poem is ironic, for that is the appropriate mode to analyse such a subject of public importance and contemporary interest.
As the poet puts it:

But cutting the chords of country care
Presents an impoverished image
Of their feelings made dull by dollars
And ideals impounded by pounds
Their Visions have been blurred
By night-clubs and swingers,
Blondes and ballrooms their ethics
Performing cultural striptease
Or Waltzing national pride
To create self-deluding thrill and calculated space
For their stubborn recondite selves.

A sense of greed blinds them to their national pride and self-respect. Thus they betray the country of their birth.

In this respect they are worse than seasonal migratory birds.

As the poet tells us,

Even birds that are forced out of home
At the turn of every season
Return to their land
Traversing incredible distances
Flapping dreams with weary wings.
But their fancy forbids them
To look beyond glamour and gold.

and ends the poem with a sense of regret:

Even Greece had its Ulysses
Who brought his ships back home
But our Heroes make no myths
And our imagination no Homer.

This is a competent poem on 'brain-drain' and the irony in the last two lines of the poem, as it were, sums up our response to Indian intellectuals living abroad as ex-patriates.

Bhatnagar reflects on a vital social problem of the day, namely 'begging' in a poem called 'Beggars can be choosers'. Beggars are beyond reformation, because they choose 'begging' as a profession. Thus the poet says,
We have a history of no bad pre-eminence
With all saints adorning our profession
And all religions making provision for our roles
A whole day's sinning and a coin in charity
Makes bad conscience in our country a rarity.

In these reflective poems, Bhatnagar views things objectively
and irony seems to be his forte. The burning problems of the
day are examined in the cannon of poetry and the poet refrains
from offering solutions. There is no attempt at moralising
and the element of didacticism is absent in the poems.
Thus the poems are saved from becoming social propaganda
and the poet here serves as an artist and not a propagandist.
Shiv K. Kumar in "Days in New York" reflects on his stay in
New York and brings a probing and alert mind to the situations
of day today living. In his words, 'In view of my extensive
travelling in the west, I seem to be constantly returning
to the theme of cultural interaction. I feel, unconsciously,
I guess, that with me contrast is almost a mode of perception.
It is this awareness that compels me to recapture my days
in New York as a kind of life in death'. In spite of his long
stay abroad, he could not help to feel that he is 'a brown
Indian/from the land of Gandhi'. He makes the contrasting
observation, though not without irony in the following lines:

The white of the negro maid's eyeballs
is the only clean thing here,
besides, of course, the quart gallon carton of milk
Squatting at my door.
They would not believe it here
that Ganges water can work miracles.
inspite of the cartloads
of dead men's ashes and bones —
daily offering to the river.

'In India', Nissim Ezekiel reflects on the social behaviour
of Indian women in parties some twenty years back.
The wives of India sit apart
They donot drink,
they donot talk,
of course, they donot kiss
The men are quite at home
among the foreign styles
(What fun the flirting is!)
I myself, decorously,
Press a thigh or two in sly innocence.
The party is a great success.

Of course, the 'wives of India' now kiss and the situation has changed since then. Nevertheless it is a very apt observation based on direct experience which immediately evokes a kind of response in the hearts of the readers and thereby achieves their total participation. Hence this is a successful reflective poem.

Writing landscape poems is a distinct trend among post-1960 Indian poets in English. Landscape offers a wide scope to these poets to write poems on and about it. Nissim Ezekiel's oft-quoted lines ring in our ears:

The Indian landscape sears my eyes,
I have become a part of it
To be observed by foreigners.

In this context, one is inclined to agree with Devindra Kohli, when he makes the following observations:

'What makes, then, an Indian poet Indian, an Australian poet, Australian, a Canadian poet Canadian, may in fact, be evident in the nature of the particular poet's response to the landscape (topographical as well as metaphorical) of his country as distinct from or conjoined with, or merging into, an intellectual and religious tradition wherever available'.
Landscape and national destiny as a theme interests quite a few of our post 1960 Indian English poets. Indian seasons, rivers, birds and inland scenery are endlessly presented and inextricably linked with the texture of recent Indian poetry in English. Our poets fascination for the Indian landscape brings a sense of joy and relief to the readers. The love play is intimately connected with the topographical landscape of the country. For instance, the failure of consummation in love is anticipated by the image of the receding sea in Kumar's "Kovalam Beach":

The vaginal creeks  
lie open thighed 
the sea's thrusts  
break into surf 
then recede 
consummation thwarted 
each time they 
miss an ovary.

One image leads to another and in the final stanza we get the vision of the poet successfully realize through the following images:

The Sea-shells  
Conches  
Lobsters  
are closed fists 
Clasping abortive dreams.

'Open thighed' and 'closed fists' are juxtaposed in the poem. Kamala Das's treatment of love in terms of the Indian landscape brings a poetic reconciliation of the spirit and the country. She incorporates the heat and dust, the sun and
rain, floods and the sense of poverty and destitution into the texture of her poetry. She brings a synthesis between the reality of love in our time ('which alters when it alteration finds') and human relationship on the one hand and the apparently unchanging contours of the Indian landscape, on the other. Her interest in topography is bound with her interest in people. With a remarkable sense of inwardness, she presents a catalogue of details which comprises the leisurely scene in "A Hot Noon in Malabar". 'Beggars', 'fortune tellers', 'Kurava girls', 'bangle-sellers', 'strangers' and 'wildmen' all haunt her mind in a hot noon and she is reminded of all of them in Malabar, when she is 'far away...'. A sense of intimacy with the landscape, as it were, reveals her interest in different kinds of people and also her 'wild thoughts' and 'wild love' at that hour. Hence her mood marches with the landscape and in a way is governed by it.

Yes, thus is
A noon for wild men, wild thoughts, wild love. To
Be her, far away, is torture.

('A Hot Noon in Malabar')

The rude summer, far from showing a sense of moral bankruptcy, paradoxically enough acts as a catalyst for the creative process or a kind of metaphor for the love experience:
What is this drink but
The April Sun, Squeezed
Like an Orange in
My glass ? I sip the
Fire, I drink and drink
Again, I am drunk,
Yes, but on the gold
Of Suns. What noble
Venom now flows through
My veins and feels my
Mind with unhurried
Laughter ? My worries
Doze. Wee bubbles ring
My glass, like a bride's
Nervous Smile, and meet
My lips. Dear, forgive
This moment's lull in
Wanting you, the blur
In Memory. How brief
You reign when I with
Glass in hand, drink, drink,
And drink again this
Juice of April Suns.

('Summer in Calcutta')

April Sun, as it were, like a barometer measures the rising and falling contours of the persona's love. In another poem called, 'Convicts' Kamala Das underlines the need for full consummation of love, when the landscape is closely integrated with the lovers in their love-making. As she puts it:

....When he
And I were one, we were neither
Male or female. There were no more
Words left, all words lay imprisoned
In the Ageing arms of night. In
Darkness we grew as in Silence
We sang, each note rising out of
Sea, out of wind, out of earth and
out of each sad night like an ache....

('Convicts')

Indian landscape comes alive in the poetry of Margaret Chatterjee and she becomes a part of it. The description of Indian seasons which gives colour to landscape is highly
commendable. In 'Monsoon' Chatterjee says,

The winter is my time
of most consent
Autumn its happy Messenger
But most of all your presence,
Is like drenching rain,
I stand beneath the water-spouts,
My body languorous....

Kashmir landscape touches the heart of the poet and two of her memorable poems which deal with such scenes are 'Kashmir Valley' and 'Danihama'. If Kashmir Valley reminds her of the 'sweet scents
of dusk
of rose and
Honey Suckle',
Where the 'birds seek late/their rest', Danihama brings to her mind the past conquerers of this place and the loss of lives caused due to their invasion and thinking of the future the poet wonders 'Now what shall we see/Next ?'

In another poem called 'The Tree' the firmness of the tree is contrasted with the unsteadiness of man. The constancy of the tree is placed above the inconsistence of human activities, which makes her say,

We stand beneath the tree
Rootless as we are,
And look up.

Margaret Chatterjee's experience is different from that of contemporary Indian born poets in English because she has to reconcile the need to accept a landscape which offered little cultural life of its own with her longing for a tradition left behind geographically but still present in the mind. Happily she has established a kind of intimacy
with the Indian landscape - an intimacy characterized by a sense of poise and inwardness. As Judith Wright has said elsewhere: 'Before one's country can become an accepted background against which the poet's and novelist's imagination can move unhindered, it must first be observed, understood, described and, as it were, absorbed. The writer must be at peace with his landscape before he can confidently turn to its human figures'. This observation is aptly borne out in Chatterjee's case.

Autumn season comes alive in O.P. Bhatnagar's poem called, 'Kashmir Autumn scene'. It is time for storing vegetables and fruits. As a contrast to human storing comes the shedding of leaves by the trees. Thus the poet concludes:

The quiet trees shed
All their belongings
like a trekkker through the snows.

In another brilliant poem called 'Trees in Autumn' O.P. Bhatnagar likens the falling of leaves from the trees to the fall of human lives and renunciation of human bondage through various allusions. For instance, Napoleon's fall in autumn in the first two stanzas and the 'self-annihilation' of Rajput maidens after the death of their husbands, and the Sanyasi who renounces the world 'by a sudden awakening' of wisdom, are like leaves fallen from the tree, as they move away from the orbit of human glory, life and bondage. Thus here, landscape and destiny seem to be blended together.

Gauri Deshpande in 'Indian Treescape' describes various trees such as Cassia, banyan, Indian popular,
lithe bamboos, the jasmines and the mango. The trees have fascinated and charmed human beings without end. The poet compares these trees with human beings to show how great they are - in that unlike human beings they are indifferent to their 'own stand or fall'! The idea embodied in the comparison is that the trees stand for others while the people stand for themselves. Deshpande's another poem, 'Poems in winter', is a nostalgic harking back to the past. The poet in the 'autumn' of her life feels restless and remembers the man whom she loved but could not marry. The intimate moments are painfully recalled. The 'eucalyptus', 'the smile', 'the spring', everything is brought back to memory. The desire to be with him at the 'autumn' of her life (when leaves drop from the trees) overwhelms her and his 'smoky-blue eyes and golden hair', which she 'wished upon my child that is born with her father's face' seem to be unbearable. Thus here goes hand in hand the human life and seasons of the year. A search for identity pre-occupies the minds of some of our poets. This search results in the composition of autobiographical poems. Thus we have poems like 'Background, Casually', by Ezekiel, 'An Introduction' by Kamala Das, 'Broken Columns' by Shiv K.Kumar and 'Rough Passage' by R.Parthasarathy. 'Background, Casually' a commissioned poem exhibits Ezekiel's background. Once for all, he decides to accept this country and particularly the Bombay city as
his own and he states it very emphatically. Ezekiel is conscious of the double impulse in him and puts it aptly in the following stanzas:

& The Song of my experience Sung,
I knew that all was yet to sing.
My ancestors, among the castes,
Were aliens crushing seed for bread
(The hooded bullock made his rounds).

and in the same poem he asserts:

The Indian landscape sears my eyes.
I have become a part of it
To be observed by foreigners.

I have made my commitments now.
This is one: to stay where I am.

('Background, Casually')

Professor William Walsh rightly stressed this double impulse in course of an article entitled in The Literary Criterion. Shiv K. Kumar's autobiographical poem, 'Broken Columns' states the different stages of his life from childhood to marriage. We come across a vast panorama of Indian life in the twelve sections of that poem. In a recent poem called 'A Reminiscence' (included in the latest volume Trapfalls in the Sky), Shiv K. Kumar feels rootless in England inspite of his brilliant career at Cambridge. Thus he says:

Smokedout, jobless, motherless
and faraway from home - that's me.

('A Reminiscence')

That is exactly the same problem with R. Parthasarathy. He too realises the agony of being rootless in an alien land.

There is something to be said for exile:
You learn roots are deep.
That language is a tree, loses colour
Under another sky.

('Rough Passage')
Kamala Das's 'An Introduction' states clearly the importance of 'self' and the search for identity in Indian English Poetry. As she puts it:

I am Indian, very brown, born in Malabar, I speak three languages, write in two, dream in one. Don't write in English they said. English is not your mother-tongue....

*******
The language I speak
Becomes mine, its distortions, its queerness
All mine, mine alone.

('An Introduction')

A.K. Ramanujan's determination: 'I must seek and will find/my particular hell only in my Hindu mind', Nissim Ezekiel's resolution: 'I have made my commitments now/This is one to stay where I am', Kamala Das's assertion: 'I am Indian, very brown/born in Malabar/I speak three languages/write in two/dream in one', R. Parthasarathy's persuasion: 'How long can foreign poets/provide the staple of your lines/Turn inward, scrape the bottom of your past', and Keki N. Daruwalla's contemplation: 'Then why should I tread the Kafka beat or the wasteland/when, mother, you are near at hand/one vast, sprawling defect' have unmistakably indicated the direction Indian English poetry is likely to take in the future. An awareness of contemporary situation and differences with various social customs, traditions and the illusion about myths compel the post-1960 Indian Poets in English to write on social concerns and some of them are adept at handling irony. Speaking of the use of irony in poetry, S.P. Bhatnagar observes "Irony for Indian Poetry in English is necessary, first of all to free the poet from
the narrow confines of his self, to unfold the irony implicit in the very fate of being an artist and to make poetry meaningful by relevance to times and its urgencies. The use of irony should not be occasional but sustained to make a mode proper to the exposition of the absurdities infesting the Indian culture and scene. Modern Indo-English poetry is concerned with and conscious of contemporary society and irony is the favourite mode in this kind of poetry dealing with the socio-economic-political scene of our country.

Irony in post-1960 Indian Poetry in English is implied or expressed in various ways and forms. "It appears as sarcasm, self-pity, detached censure, incisive wit, and also as a contrast between an ideal and an actual situation", observes V.A. Shahane and I am inclined to agree with him. In his commissioned autobiographical poem, "Background, Casually", Nissim Ezekiel brings out the contrast between the ideal and the actual, the religious conflict of his childhood and upbringing and the irony arising out of the difference between holy, religious ideals and unholy practices:

I went to Roman Catholic School,  
A mugging Jew among the wolves,  
They told me I had killed the Christ,  
That year I won the scripture prize  
A muslim Sportsman boxed my ears.

The irony arising out of the contrast between religious professions and practices is clearly brought out in the following lines:
A home on Friday nights, the Prayers were said. My morals had declined. I heard of Yoga and of Zen. Could I, perhaps, be rabbi-saint? The more I searched the less I found.

The ironic detachment with which Ezekiel sees objects and people around him tends to create an exclusively comic effect. 'I have never written tragedy - my normal preference is for comedy, and ideas with irony. I do not write to entertain but if I do, I am not displeased.' This observation is borne out in poems such as, 'For a friendly critic',

Your motives donot matter
Your delirium does......

Or in

I am protected by intellectuality
You by your lack of it

Or in 'Guru':

The Saint, we are told
Once lived a life of sin -
nothing spectacular, of course
just the usual things

the poet is consciously ironic which results in comedy and there is not much poetry in it. But when it explodes into good poetry, it is an understatement of pain as in

thank God, the scorpion picked on me
and spared my children

('Night of the Scorpion')

One notices a quiet acceptance of the facts of the self and life as in

His follies are familiar
accepted
like Old friends
incapable of quarreling with them
he maintains the old State
unredeemable relationships.

('Hymns in Darkness')
Kamala Das's mode of stating simple facts of life is ironic. Apparently a statement may appear innocuous but in the given context it charges the poem with a new meaning. A poem like, 'The Fancy-Dress' makes the point clear and the poem begins as follows:

Every virtue requires today
A fancy dress;

Then the poem is built up with slow movements through common words and the attack is gradually mounted on the priest, the politician, the patriots, who have ignored 'the children of the poor'. They (the poor) now lie unclaimed in the city morgues. And the ending inevitably becomes ironic:

God is in his heaven and all
Is right with this stinking world.

One word 'Stinking' brings a heaven of difference to Browning's concept of God and World. In this context, the meaning is obliquely stated.

In Keki N. Daruwalla, the application of irony is local, finite and limited. In 'Boat-Ride Along the Ganga', 'the river keeps moving, dark as gangrene' and the gangrene image suggests the ironic view of the speaker. Gangrene sets in where there is no blood supply to any part of the body. In the present context we have to take the gangrene image not in its usual sense but as indicative of the general malaise one feels on the bank of Ganga. This is borne out in the following lines:

The Ganga flows through the land
not to lighten the misery
but to show it.
The title poem, 'Crossing of Rivers' has the built-in dialectic that emerges out of the misery and mystery associated with the river. The protagonist of the poem lives with a fisher girl that saves him. Fifteen years later she leaves him. Speculating on her motives for leaving him and the possible places of her journey's destination he feels:

But driven by the wind of the spirit
She had sallied forth
On the Ardh. Kumbh trail
begging for food
from grove to grove
and hamlet to village square -
the old slave-route of the Hindu Psyche.

The irony in the passage just quoted above is understandable.

'I feel, unconsciously, I guess, that with me contrast is a mode of perception', says Shiv K. Kumar. The 'contrast' about which Kumar speaks here, is nothing but irony, wherein one thing is said but another is meant. Kumar's autobiographical poem, 'Broken Columns' excels in ironic mode:

I carry my bride home -
a fungal seed to breed hydros.
The first sunrise leaves at my door
a dead cockroach -
in the milk-bottles
news of the porcupine's resurrection
and a defaced horoscope.

('Wood Peckers' P.15)

Irony is a mode of self-discovery in Kumar while he is liberated from the irony as a poetic mode and conventional cliche, the poet finds liberation for his own language, as well as his poetic self. Irony in such cases is deeper than mere comments. In 'My Co-respondent' the poet tells us,
While you rose like some giraffe
I slouched over worms
Climbing up diamond-knots of wet grass
Each night I limped into my lone self
Where the dead croaked like frogs.

Self-revelation comes through the use of irony in 'To a
Prostitute' and the Poet aptly observes:

For my son will ferment
the same yeast
as my father's father,
and what you offer me now
Was also my mother's gift
to a stranger
My wife awaits me round the corner
to reclaim what's left of me.

Sanctity imposed on a prostitute is the real source of irony
in the poem, as the prostitution of religion for acquisitive motives in Chaucer's Friar inhere a veiled irony. As B.P. Parasher has rightly observed in this context that, 'Kumar makes the great of banal and by a penetrating diagnosis of the issue, reveals a juxtaposition of vile and virtuous, coarse and pure, profane and pious. The poem is a brilliant picture of a prostitute against a mother and a wife, compound of vulnerable and venerable, of that we revere and that we run down what takes us by surprise is the correspondence between a prostitute and a mother and the anxiety of the wife to rejuvenate the used husband'.

In 'Mango Vendor', the oldman blissfully unaware of his predicament ogles the woman who defeats him with a rebuff, and as it were, cautions him about the futility of unnatural passion:
This old man's eyes
Spy something, man
Or move on
to the crypt
where death will pull
the remaining stray hair
from your green skull.

The youthful woman's confrontation with the man of ripe years is in itself capable of evoking an ironic situation which is delineated by antinomies: Youth and age, vernal bloom and autumnal mellowness, physical luxuriance and material poverty. Unfulfilled love and unconsummated sex life are evoked in the use of irony and Kumar harps not on transcendental love but on the perversion of physical desire. The surfeit of love symbolized by a 'Cockroach' obliterates charity and smoothness, lock, stock and barrel. If one notices the utter exhaustion in love finds an outlet in 'To a Young Wife':

Ask me not to act
Deed is now my perdition.

(Subterfuges, 29)

the Savage and obstinate irony surfaced in 'The Sun Temple, Konark':

For every cornice
an owl hoots;
Do, do, do,
but my lady bird is counting calories before she slumps
beside me as a tombstone
while I wait for the breakers
to at least cleanse my feet.

(Subterfuges, P.28)

In 'Poet Laureate' Kumar exposes the hollowness of the readers and researchers in their endeavour to read poetry
in the light of the private life of the poet Laureate:

What shall I ask this
little exhibit of the muses
whose poems have been sucked
bored and flattened
in the creative writing courses,
and whose sex life has been laid bare
by Zealous psycho-analytic researchers?

The under current of irony is poignant, especially when private sex life of the poet Laureate is to be examined by psycho-analytic method in order to provide a key to the understanding and appreciation of his poetry.

A.K. Ramanujan skilfully discloses the irony implicit in the ways of looking at the death of the father in a poem called, 'Obituary'. The event of the father's death should ordinarily evoke emotions of love and reverence. But the whole perspective in 'obituary' is conceived in an ironic mode:

Father, when 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.

The ashes and the bones of the dead father are to be thrown in a confluence - 'where three rivers met near the railway station':

no long standing headstone
with his full name and two dates
to hold in their parentheses
everything he didn't quite
manage to do himself
like his cal^arian birth
in a brahmin ghetto
and his death by heart
failure in the fruit market.
In "Still another view of Grace" he presents the conflict between physical passion and inherited morality by means of ironically contrasted situations. The irony of the situation is so powerfully communicated that it calls in question the rationale behind the Brahminic moral code and asserts the triumph of physical passion. The protagonist who has been 'bred Brahmin among singers of shivering hymns' warns his mistress, presumably a non-brahmin woman, against following, 'a gentleman's morals' and desperately advises her 'to find any beast in the wind/for a husband' so that she may be blessed with 'a houseful of legitimate sons'. The situation that follows provides a severely ironic comment, which is convincing in the finality of its poetic rendering:

But there she stood
Upon that dusty road on a nightlit april mind
and gave me a look, commandments crumbled
in my father's past. Her tumbled hair suddenly known
as silk in my angry hand, I shook a little
and took her, behind the laws of my land

Poems such as, 'Small Scale reflections on a great House',
'One, Two may be Three, arguments against suicide', 'Love
Poem for a wife I' and 'Entries for a Catalogue of Fears' are replete with ironic observations.

O.P. Bhatnagar who is deeply conscious of and pain-
fully aware of realities of life and present day living,
is also in a way committed to irony as a mode, without
which it is impossible to 'concretize the texture of the
wide range of contradictions permeating our life and
character'. As he puts it:
To see the whole truth
I must loosen my eyelids
And bring my visions
To a close

(Intellectual')

In Bhatnagar one notices 'both the ironic commentator of politics in poetry and politics exploding into Poetry - i.e., when it ceases to be mere politics itself. In such moments, its concern is not with the 'Power Politics' or even 'Philosophy of Politics', in his own words, but with genuine suffering and simple humanity' as K.Chellapppan rightly observes. When it is irony of the first kind it is explicit as in, - 'who is Afraid of Fear':

And like prometheus brought fire from Heaven
For the selfless good of humanity
The rest only following in a mockrage.

In 'Nailing by the Wall' Bhatnagar harps on our indifference to values and perverted craze for pleasure, in his characteristic ironic mode:

The Saints from bars, brothels and night clubs
Tasting of Cashinos and underworld
Turn morals, values and virtues to ice cream licked by fun loving children in ones,
Immortal as mortality I walk like a ghost
On the ramparts of desolate time
Unable to relieve the past
Or feast on the present in high robes.

In another poem Bhatnagar ironically states, 'Man made temples - not for human beings' but for 'Gods'. He also speaks of immoral politics in 'The Peacock' which is full of irony and wit in the given context.

Knowing no political menopause
And sterilizing conscience
With cultured exorcism
He has got into power with - slimy ease
Acquiring property, shares and virtues new
On an unethical lease.
R. Parthasarathy brings out irony of his state of exile. After spending his youth, 'whoring after English gods', the poet comes back to consciousness:

There is something to be said for exile:
You learn roots are deep,
That language is a tree, loses colour
Under another sky.

Even the statue of Queen Victoria is described with an ironic touch:

Victoria sleeps on her island
alone, an old hag,
Shaking her invincible locks.

In Parthasarathy's artistically designed poems, 'feelings beggar description, yet, the irony of the situation can hardly be missed. However, the irony of the situation is also endowed with delicate feelings:

I made myself an expert
in farewells. An unexpected November
shut the door in my face;
I crashed, a glasshouse
hit by the stone of Father's death
At the burning ghat
relations stood like exclamation points.

In 'The Old Play house', Kamala Das is ironic about the treatment meted out to her by her husband. Her ironic perception of reality is expressed through condensed, original images:

You called me wife
I was taught to break Saccharino
into your tea and
To offer at the right moment
the vitamins cowering
Beneath your monstrous ego I ate the magic loaf and
Became a dwarf. I lost my will
and reason, to all your
Questions I mumbled - incoherent replies.
This ironic protest against the husband leads her to
generalise the grievances of woman who have suffered from
their enforced subjection to the tyranny of self-centred men:

   The strongman's technique is
Always the same, he serves his love
   - in lethal doses
For love is Narcissus at the water's
   edge, haunted
By its lonely face

Ironic mode is a familiar mode with post-1960 Indian poetry in English. Examples can be multiplied if one tries to elaborate this trend among our poets.

Writing about people is also a favourite trend in post 1960 Indian Poetry in English. In such kind of writings one almost discerns an elegiac trend and obituary references are couched in emotive language. In his poem, 'Pablo Picasso', Bhatnagar pays tribute to the great artist and gives credit to him for exploding, 'Pretentious Pose' and bringing 'Profundity in art'. Margaret Chatterjee pays tributes to Boris Pasternak in a poem called, 'Homage to Boris Pasternak'. O.P. Bhatnagar's poem, "Of the copy and the original" is based on the life of painter, Gainsborough, who 'sat eleven anxious days/painting the eluding portrait/of easy Miss Burr'. This portrait became not only life like but baffling. As the poet puts it:
When the painter came to present
His original to Miss Burr
She was so delighted
With the fine copy of herself
That she readily proposed
'You are presenting a copy to me
How about having the original for yourself'
The artist was puzzled
And remained so for quite sometime
Choosing the copy from the original.

Keki N. Daruwalla's 'Martin Luther King' is a tribute to
the late American leader who fought for the black and in
the process attained Matyrdom. As there is the possibility
of distorting his life and turn him into myth, the poet
suggests that he should be remembered for what he has done.

Enough if we say
that life and death for him
where both sustained by meaning
that his passions were of
the bloodstream of truth that he died
with his dreams still warm as life
in the fullness of his song
in the fullness of his passion.

In his poem, 'To Gandhi', while paying tribute to the great
departed leader, Daruwalla skillfully underlined the ironic
situation on every 2nd October on the occasion of Gandhi
Jayanti. We Indians have failed Gandhi and instead of
following his ideals we merely observe his birthday as an
annual ritual. Thus the poet very aptly concludes:

So, M.K. Gandhi
don't accuse us of forgetfulness
Once a year
we always remember you
for on Gandhi Jayanti
the butchers shut up shop
and we go without mutton.

Poems are also written on other poets who are supposed to
have influenced or hindered the poetic process of our poets.
Thus we have Nissim Ezekiel's, 'For William Carlos Williams'
and Gauri Deshpande's, 'To Judith Wright, At Karla'. Ezekiel though does not wish to follow William Carlos Williams, admires him. Thus he says,

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{I do not want} \\
\text{to write} \\
\text{Poetry like yours} \\
\text{but still I} \\
\text{love} \\
\text{the way you do.}
\end{align*}
\]

The musicality of Williams' poetry is not missed upon Ezekiel and the meaning is intelligible. The structure of his poem is 'firm' and there is a touch of memorableness about it. Ezekiel loves it does not feel inclined to imitate it. Thus he ends,

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{It comes to me} \\
\text{Beloved Poem} \\
\text{I love it} \\
\text{And then let it go.}
\end{align*}
\]

Apart from showing Williams' method of writing poems, this poem also shows Ezekiel's originality.

Gauri Deshpande brings out a situation which once stimulated Judith Wright and hopes that will also do the same thing to her.

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{For you will also remember} \\
\text{The patchwork quilt of greens and browns} \\
\text{Below the day of hazy sunlight,} \\
\text{How pleased you were to find} \\
\text{Frangipani} \\
\text{And gum and Chinese lantern growing} \\
\text{Here, the same as in your home.}
\end{align*}
\]

Shiv K. Kumar pays tribute to Indira Gandhi who fell to the assassin's bullet and became a martyr. In a poem called 'Black Wednesday' Kumar deeply mourns the death of Indira Gandhi, under tragic circumstances. Thus he says,

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{A surfeit of trust can be a flaw,} \\
\text{You caressed their hoods, fed them on} \\
\text{a mother's milk, denying your own offspring.}
\end{align*}
\]
Kumar records the reaction of our people and their gratitude to their leader in a subtle way.

All day, I have watched devotees -
their faces wan, dazed or sanguine
like raw steel in an incensed furnace
Circling round a broken idol
now reposed in floral quietude
Oh God, donot let this happen again!

('Black Wednesday')

When one looks at the trends of post-1960 Indian poetry in English, one notices that the women poets and the male poets tend to depict different kinds of pictures and situations in their poetry. Women poets weep in nostalgia in their love poetry and their approach to love is sentimental. Nodoubt they give a very daring portrayal of love in their poetry - the love poetry of Kamala Das and Gauri Deshpande are cases in point. Women poets look at love from the feminine point of view, and hence it interests and fascinates the readers. Kamala Das's 'The Looking Glass' is a remarkable poem from this point of view. This approach to love though illumines female hunger for love and her understanding of male species, it shocks the readers for its unconventional approach. The poem runs like this:

Getting a man to love is easy
Only be honest about your wants as
Woman. Stand nude before the glass with him
So that he sees himself the stronger one
And believes it so, and you so much more
Softer, Younger, lovelier . . . . . .
. . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .
. . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .
Gift him all,
Gift him what makes you woman, the scent of
Long hair, musk of sweat between the breasts
The shock of menstrual blood, and all your
Endless female hungers.
Male poets do write love poems and also project love from various angles but they never weep in nostalgia. But both male and female poets emphasize the physical aspect of love.

Women poets write more and more landscape poems and they seem to be deeply aware of inland scenery. Contemporary existence though interest them, they are never very critical of the absurdities of everyday life. They nodoubt touch these aspects in their poetry but only tangentially. Male poets take seriously the realities of everyday life and express their feelings in strong terms. To think, it hurts, seems to be their approach to the vital problem of our contemporary life and living. They never fight shy of it, never run away from it and instead, meet the challenges bravely. They accept life on life's terms and 'see life steadily and see it whole'. For them landscape and destiny, (to some extent national identity) go together. Some of them try hard to acclimatize English language to indigenous tradition. This no other woman poet except Kamala Das, has tried to do.

'Surrealism' and 'avant grade', though favourite terms to describe post war English Poetry, one cannot legitimately apply these two terms to the movement of post-1960 Indian Poetry in English. Because this poetry is a new phenomenon despite the claim of the existence of a tradition in Indian English Poetry. I have shown in chapter II, how these poets have set new trends and made a new beginning, discarding conciously or otherwise the
Romantic movement in the poetry of Toru Dutt, Sarojini Naidu and Sri Aurobindo. The emphasis on realism and the desire to acclimatize English language to an indigenous tradition are two hallmarks of post-1960 Indian Poetry in English. Hence, the love in their poetry is not divine love but human love which takes two bodies to fulfill it. Landscape attracts their attention for it helps to establish a national identity. Throughout their poetry there is a search for 'self' in relation to the nation and they seek to establish an identity that is both lovable and recognizable in Indian context. Above all, there is a desire on the parts of our poets to establish Indian poetry in English as a distinct literature in the realms of World literatures written in English. (This is borne out by the technique they adopt in their poetry, which is discussed in chapter-IV.)
REFERENCES


9. ibid, P.54.


