CHAPTER IV

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Indian Poetry in English in the nineteen sixties and after registered a change both in its concerns for themes and techniques. Generally one comes across two kinds of poetry - 'Direct Poetry' in which the meaning is explicitly stated, and 'Oblique Poetry' in which the usual approach is to juxtapose images and symbols so that the reader may draw the implicit connections for himself as in the works of the poets like Nissim Ezekiel, A.K.Ramanujan, R.Parthasarathy, Shiv K.Kumar, Keki N.Daruwalla, O.P.Bhatnagar, Kamala Das, Gauri Deshpande, Gauri Pant, Lila Ray, Monika Varma, and Margaret Chatterjee. The techniques adopted in Indian English Poetry before 1960 were to a large extent, to say the least, imitative and derivative. That was in a way, a historical imperative. Paradoxically enough more and more Indians began writing poetry in English freely and with some confidence only after they got rid of the native speakers of English. The new mind required the new voice and the new voice was discovered by the poet's genius for intimately registering the idiom of his own world. In post 1960's one notices the emergence of new voices slowly making themselves heard as the important poets try to cast off derivative techniques and break away from forms which are beginning to stifle and constrict their creative freedom in a damaging way.
Poets like Nissim Ezekiel, A.K. Ramanujan, R. Parthasarathy, Shiv K. Kumar, Keki N. Daruwalla, O.P. Bhatnagar, Kamala Das, Gauri Deshpande, Gauri Pant, Lila Ray, Monika Varma and Margaret Chatterjee not only say new things but say it in a manner quite different from their predecessors. These poets have brought innovations in form, imagery, style, structure, and employed in their poetry a new kind of diction akin to colloquial language and rhythm. These poets, as Professor William Walsh remarked elsewhere, 'follow the contours of a speech which is both contemporary and distinctively Indian'. The informal, assertive and conversational tone marks a definite departure from the past and a new beginning in the present. Some of the poets mentioned above are very near to be called confessional poets, though the confessional tone is more a strategy than a reality.

Indians have developed a kind of mannerism in spoken form and the post-1960 Indian poets in English try to approximate to this speech rhythm in their poetry. These poets 'follow the contours of speech' and try to re-create a just and lively presentation of Indian character and situation in their poetry. The purpose behind employing such a technique is to catch the spirit of the personages in actual form so that they can achieve the reader's total participation. This technique also aims at creating a new Indian English idiom. Nissim Ezekiel is the first poet to undertake such a task. Here are some examples from his poetry:
Everything is coming -
Regeneration, Remuneration, Contraception
Be patiently, brothers and sisters,
Oneday Ram Rajya is surely coming

('Very Indian Poem in Indian English')

This year my leave application
Was twice refused
Everyday there is so much work
and I donot get overtime
My wife is always asking for more money
Money, Money where to get money ?
My job is such, none is giving bribe,
While other Clerks are in fortunate position
and no promotion even because I am not Graduate.

('The Railway Clerk')

You are all knowing, friends,
What sweetness is in Miss Pushpa
I donot mean only external sweetness
but internal sweetness,
Miss Pushpa is smiling and smiling
even for no reason
but simply because she is feeling.

('Goodbye Party for Miss Pushpa T.S')

A relief party came at last
Five students
With a transistor,
a tin of biscuits,
a Camera.

...............
The Transistor was on
the biscuits were distributed,
the Camera Clicked
Then the students left
humming the tune
of a popular Hindi Film song.

('The Truth About the Floods')

What Ezekiel attempts to do in these poems is to bring
different situations alive to us and hence the characters
appear life-like and atmosphere real to us. Apart from
this there is an attempt to use unlexical Indian English
in Poetry, as evident from poems like 'Goodbye party for
Miss Pushpa T.S. and 'The Railway Clerk'. The use of present progressive tense instead of simple present tense is a common feature in spoken Indian English and our poets have tried to incorporate this form of language into their poetry. The state of this form of language is very aptly suggested by Keki N. Daruwalla in a poem called, 'The Mistress'. 'No one believes me when I say/my mistress is half-caste', states the poet and proceeds, 'You can make her out the way she speaks/her consonants bludgeon you', and 'she is not Anglo-Indian', 'she is not Goan, not Syrian Christian/she is Indian English, the language that I use'. Again we notice the use of ungrammatical words for the sake of evoking a colloquial speech-rhythm, as is evident from Ezekiel's poem, 'The Professor'; when the protagonist asks his student to visit him in the following words:

If you are coming again this side by chance,  
Visit please my humble residence also,  
I am living just on opposite house's back side.

Poem after poem Ezekiel has demonstrated the use of Indian English in its colloquial spoken form and followed the 'contours of speech' of the characters that he described in his poetry. Let us take an example from a poem called, 'Hangover'.
Half the day hazy with the previous night.
The non-drinker drinking, non-smoker smoking.
Two or three men, two or three girls.
The red-coated waiters of Harbour Bar.
The red light district dancer at the Apollo Room.
The foreigners and the foreign-returned.
The expensive menu and the shadow of Marx.
The Biryani Hyderabadi and the sighs for Bangala Desh.
The see through dress and the show-nothing sari
The fog in the head and the sense of success.
The music Indian and the language English.

No Indian Whisky sir all imported this is Taj.
Yes Sir Soda is Indian sir.

Midnight.
Taxi-Strike George Fernades.
Long Walk to Churchgate between pavement sleepers.
Last train to Borivli, stopping at all stations.

All these lines are faulty so far as English grammar is concerned but this is the way in which half-educated Indians speak English and the situation is real.

Let us take another recent poem of Ezekiel called 'Soap' written in the similar vein.

Some people are not having manners,
this I am always observing,
For example otherday I find
I am needing soap
for ordinary washing myself purposes.

That shopman he's giving me soap
but I'm finding it defective version.

That shopman is saying
and very rudely he is saying it,
What is wrong with soap?
Still I am keeping my temper
and repeating very smilingly
Please to note this defect in soap,
and still he is denying the truth.
So I'm getting very angry that time
and with loud voice I am saying
YOU ARE BLIND OR WHAT?
Now he is shouting
YOU ARE CALLING ME BLIND OR WHAT?
Come outside and I will show you.
Here again, the situation is live but the tone is potentially mocking. With a keen sense of humour and sharp eye for reality. Ezekiel handles such situations in his poetry in an immaculate way. No other Indian English poet before him has written poetry in such a way so as to convince the readers of the reality of the Indian situation.

Keki N. Daruwalla and R. Parthasarathy wrote some poems in such a fashion. Daruwalla's 'The Professor condoles' is a case in point.

Your brother died, you said?
Eleven years old and run over by a car?
I am so terribly sorry to hear it!
Pardon me, not tragic, as you said just now
Unfortunate is the word, terribly unfortunate.
Nothing could be more . . . more unpleasant.
But 'tragedy is clean, it is restful, it is flawless',
as Anouilh said. This was an accident . . .
derpravity of circumstance.
There was no air of design about it, you follow?

Like Ezekiel's poems, here also the situation is real and the tone is potentially mocking.

R. Parthasarathy's 'Incident at Ahmedpore Station: A letter', based on a newspaper report amply demonstrates the wrong use of English in Indian situations. This is how the poem runs:

I am arrive by passenger train at Ahmedpore Station
and my belly is too much swelling
With jackfruit, I am therefore went to privy,
Just as - 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.
The poem illustrates how the semi-literate Indians use English in a typical unEnglish way to describe real situations. The poet here tries to evoke a situation in his bid re-create the character that he is mocking at. A.K. Ramanujan instead of evoking a situation, gives a new interpretation to old traditional values. Unlike traditional Indian poets, Ramanujan does not give a conventional song of praise for the full river in his poem 'A River'. On the other hand, he narrates what he sees of it as the villagers' real experience. The visitor to the village reports what really happens, in the language of a common villager. The river is Vaikai which flows through Madurai, a city that has for about two thousand years been the seat of Tamil Culture. The poet gives details which are striking because they are usually below the water level - 'straw and women's hair' caught in the rusty bars of the 'water gates', and patches of repair on the bridges. The impression of the stones in the river has been successfully conveyed to us by the two following comparisons:

the wet stones glistening like sleepy Crocodiles, the dryones Shaven water-buffaloes lounging in the Sun.

The rise of water during flood may be exciting. But it also causes losses and damages to human life and property. The visitor in the poem rightly reports about water 'rising on the bathing places, and the way it carried off three village houses'. Ramanujan describes the realities about
flood and the whole-sale destruction that is caused by it, in order to reiterate the loss the poet repeats a few lines of the second stanza. The details about twins, which the woman would have borne, brings the experience down to its simple and painful humanity. Thus the visitor tells us:

    and one pregnant woman
    expecting identical twins
    with no moles on their bodies,
    with different-coloured diapers
to tell them apart.

Ordinary things have been described in simple language and the complaint of the poet against the old as well as new poets has been stated unequivocally in a straightforward line, 'The Poets sang only of the floods'. The greatness of the poem lies in the fact that the traditional praise for river has been contrasted with what is actually experienced by the people during the floods.

The use of symbols and employment of imagery in the post-1960 Indian poetry make an interesting and absorbing reading. City has become an integral part of modern poetics. In T.S. Eliot, the city is the urbs aeterna declined into li' mondecite, a model derived from Virgil and Dante, of imperium in its metropolitan manifestation as Professor Frank Kermode puts it. Following Eliot and Auden, modern Indo-English poets have employed the image of 'city' in their poetry with great vigour and enthusiasm. In Ezekiel we find the image of 'City' in his important books of verse like The Unfinished Man, The Exact Name and Hymns in Darkness.
As a man strives to exist in a modern Urban Society, to search after truth and to realize identity with the self, and the community, his struggles, failures and frustrations reveal not only his own inward nature but also the insufficiency and frailty of the fallen city, an image of immense possibility and significance. Take for instance, the poem, 'Urban'. The 'City' that 'like a passion burns' is the image of the bride, and in an ideal sense a complete sexual union would mark the realization of fullness and identity. Since the persona merely 'dreams' and shies away from her, the use of the key word, 'Kindred' in the last line turns out to be ironical. Thus what the persona achieves is a kind of illusory union with the 'City' and this forms a habitual response to it.

In The Unfinished Man and The Exact Name, one notices that the city has moved forward to a prominent position in the poet's consciousness. Ezekiel makes the following observations in poems called, 'Morning Walk', 'In India' and 'City Song':

Barbaric City sick with slums,
Deprived of seasons, blessed with rain,
Its hawkers, beggars, iron-lunged
procession led by frantic drums,
A million purgatorial lamas,
And child-like masses many-tongued,
Whose wages are in words and crumbs.

('Morning Walk, 9)
Always in the Sun's eye,
Here among the beggars,
Hawkers, Pavement Sleepers,
Hutment dwellers, Slums,
Dead souls of men and gods,
Burn-out mothers, frightened
Virgins, Wasted child.
And tortured animal,
All in noisy silence.

Suffering the place and time
I ride my elephant of thought
A c'ezanne slung round my neck.

('In India')

As I sway in the breeze
The city sways below.
Suddenly I learn
What I always knew:
I don't wish to go any higher
I want to return
As soon as I can,
To be of this city
To feel its hot breath
I have to belong . . .

('City Song')

In the course of years gone by there is a change of attitude
to this city (i.e. Bombay) and the poet sees through the
outward manifestation of it. Thus the 'barbaric city' has
become his beloved city and the sense of belonging to it is
absolute and final. The commitment to life in a particular
place (i.e. Bombay) has brought a whole new dimension to
Ezekiel's poetry. He now sees India through Bombay. In
Hymns in Darkness he talks about a middle-aged city dweller,
who in a faithless environment, is unaware of reality, but
in his unconscious mind searches after it. The 'city'
symbolizing the illusion of spirituality confuses the
'city dweller'. Hence he is unable to comprehend the truth
because he in his illusion of reality looks at the nakedness of truth in the spirit of a peeping Tom'.

Ezekiel's Bombay is located in the present and it lacks the historical dimension. The city is as much within him as without. As Professor J. Birje-Patil rightly suggested that, 'Ezekiel's originality lies in his projection of Bombay as a metaphor which defines the alienation of the modern Indian intellectual, brought up in the Judaeo-Christian and Greco-Roman traditions and being forced to come to terms with a culture whose response to life is controlled by a totally different metaphysics'. This city (i.e. Bombay) has become central to Ezekiel's poetic thought and an integral part of his poetics. Since most of the post 1960 Indian poets in English live in cities, 'City' for them remains as an image of commitment. For R. Parthasarathy it stands for an impersonal world of non-relationship.

Like a hand at rest,
the Pelegic city
is immobile. Between us there is no Commerce

('Rough Passage')

Margaret Chatterjee compares the winter of her present city of living (Delhi) with the winter of her city of past, (London), when the 'fingers is numb/over the Piano keys'. Her past and present gets irrevocably two cities of her living: London and Delhi.

It is difficult to maintain one's identity in cosmopolitan cities like New York and the symbolic 'City' is highly impersonal and its inhabitants are nameless. Only colour provides a clue to the identity of one's race.

As Shiv K. Kumar rightly says:
Questions catapult in the air:
'Are you a Puerto Rican?
A Jamaican? A Red Indian?'
I look for the feathers on my skull,
a band around my forehead,
And mumble, 'No, a brown Indian,
from the land of Gandhi'

('Days in New York')

To some of our gifted poets like Shiv K.Kumar, A.K.Ramanujan,
R.Parthasarathy, and O.P.Bhatnagar 'the image is not only
the spring-board of poetic composition but the Kernel as well'.
Images are central to the concept of their thoughts and they
are primarily visual. The unmistakable Indian images heighten
the thought pattern of the poem. Sometimes the entire poem
boils down to one central image. Take for instance the
following examples:

Thoughts consume life
Like Sun evaporating water.

(O.P.Bhatnagar: "Questioning Life")

The entire island:
an alligator
Sleeping in a mask of stone.
A grim of land
even on good days, on bad,
the ocean foams in that mouth

(Ramanujan: 'No Man is an Island')

Patiently they sit
like empty pitchers
On the mouth of the village well
Pleating hope in each braid
of the Mississippi - long hair . . .

(Shiv K.Kumar: 'Indian Women')

Bhatnagar's smile at once drives home the paradoxical nature
of his statement. The imagery suggested in the lines quoted
above is visual and concrete. As R.Parthasarathy rightly
suggested that, 'the poem about Indian women projects
Kumar's response to a familiar situation: the impoverishment
of the human spirit. Images of futility and hopelessness
reinforce the structure of the poem. Here, nostalgia achieves the finish of an etching on copper plate.\(^4\)

In one of his poems, Keki N. Daruwalla sees himself reflected in his wife's eyes as one of the 'difficult animals' of 'this animal delirium that we call life'. As Nissim Ezekiel rightly observes that 'his poetry controls and shapes the difficulties of his temperament without emptying it of delirium. A friend who offers him the facile solutions of myth and the tragic vision in the usual 'Poetry talk' gets a stern and memorable reprimand. One hears the voice of over-intellectualization and the antidote to it in the poet's ironic sense of symbolic reality':\(^5\)

In a curved universe, a straight metric line is floundering in a rut
You must give it multiple meaning.
A work of art must hit you in the gut.
I strike an attitude and knife a pig
and tough-guy that I am, I bring out his guts.
Three dimensions of space, one of time,
dreams, memories, senses - your meagre tools,
- and a tradition that is portly.
Can you fashion reality with these tools?
I agree. I will be starting
a Sausage factory shortly.

(Dialogue with a Third Voice)
Images are drawn from mathematics to bring home the point that reality is larger than life.

Shiv K. Kumar is adept in making new images. The poem 'My Little Daughter' for example, is built round the contrast between the 'occult signs of some prenatal vision' flowing from the child and the ossified, 'Steel-edged' words in which the adult seeks non-existent meaning. As G.S. Amur
pointed out that, 'the poet's impatience with the limitations of human language finds agonized expression in 'Mission Beach' as well:

There must be some other way
of reaching you
than sending out teeth-gnashers
four columns deep.

('Mission Beach')

The same preoccupation is reflected in 'Lear to Cordelia', one of Kumar's successful poems, where the poet comes to terms with language by accepting its limitations, and at the same time, recognizing the urge to go 'beyond the emiring point':

I know
how much I may claim.
And yet this witless urge
to Scrape dispason
Out of dead Oyster-shells.

('Lear to Cordelia')

Similarly R. Parthasarathy while trying to come to grips with language uses the images of 'tree' and 'sky' to bring home the dichotomy between one's mother tongue and second language. As he puts it:

He had spent his youth whoring
after English gods
There is something to be said for exile:

You learn roots are deep
That language is a tree, loses colour.
Under another sky.

('Exile' : 2)

Contemporary Love Poetry, as it were, is a storehouse of startling images. The technique employed in this poetry is a fragmentary evocative impressionism - half-recaptured moments of love and sympathy touched with a wistful romanticism. The breakdown of regular forms has helped to
release a flood of love poetry based on extravagant imagery and startling sensation. With the proliferation of images, the technique becomes very loose and lines read like prose.

Kamala Das, a leading love poet of our time, examines love in all its details. The persona, having failed in married life, felt that she suffered from an extinction of her personality by the 'monstrous ego' of her husband. The comparison which immediately comes to her mind is that of Narcissus.

The strong man'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 own lonely face...

('The Old Play House')

The persona's search for ideal love fails and she hopes to get away from the clutch of the husband someday. In 'The Prisoner' she likens the body to a prison. She looks at her husband's body as a prisoner looks at the prison and hopes to get out of it. She puts it:

As the convict studies
His prison's geography
I study the trappings
Of your body, dear love,
For I must someday find
An escape from its snare.

Convict-prison imagery is highly suggestive of unrequited love and an escape from this kind of bondage is rightly sought for. In another poem, the persona remembers an affair with a man who took her love without giving his:

... Not knowing what
Else to do, I kiss your eyes, dear one, your lips
like
Petals drying at the edges, the burnt cheeks and
The dry grass of your hair, and in stillness, I sense
The tug of time, I see you go away from me
And feel the loss of love I never once received.
The similes such as 'lips like petals' 'hair like dry grass' bringing images from nature are very appropriate. In another poem, Kamala Das examines the emptiness within and the daily machinations with which she tries to cover it up. As she puts it:

... The heart,
An empty cistern, waiting
Through long hours, fills itself
With coiling snakes of silence... To a mere freak. It's only
To save my face, I flaunt, at
Times, a grand, flamboyant lust

In Gauri Deshpande's 'Departure Time 2.30 A.M.', the persona represents the attitude of the lover for whom, 'love is only a function of time'. The lover does not understand the sentiment of the lady love and seems to be unconcerned with parting. That makes the beloved's heart heavy and she ruminates the past. The duration of separation is apprehended through the monthly cycle as the poet says, 'one Moon month after you left/ (I know it by my womb's staining blood'). This unconventional image is employed to emphasize the physical loss arising out of sexual starvation.

'In Absentia', another poem of Gauri Deshpande recalls the persona's past love affair with the lover and expresses her unhappiness in his absence. The rainy day which evokes sensuality is now painful to her and winter which is a symbol of decadence, is thought to have overtaken her as is indicated in the line: 'I know winter is here to stay'. The parting is so shocking that even re-union could bring them 'no joy'. The reality of the 'present misery' is too cruel 'to be lived again' and thus she says:
Teeth clenched
Breath held
I wait for your coming
For, from that moment
I must start to live
The coming of your departure.

'Teeth clenched' and 'breath held' are visual images which suggest the impatience over the absence of the lover.

Gauri Deshpande describes vividly the sex act done in a poem called, 'Poems on a lost love'. The technique she adopts is that of a cluster of visual and auditory images through which the poem develops and moves to its destination. The poem is in six sections, each section illumining the whole and one image leading to the other and finally being integrated with the texture of the poem. The first, tells us, the warmth that she received out of physical union is too precious to be taken away from her by 'Cold air' and the union makes a 'blue-black' and urgent mask in the lover's 'tired thigh'. Through the union they came to know each other's 'secret self' which according to her is 'bejewelled and bright red/in a fellowship of blood'. The third section of the poem is more symbolic, where she imagined herself as earth ('I am earth') and she receives the first physical union as 'the first rain/sweet, generous/lashing, throbbing/its smell for ever in my blood/its imprint deep/within my quick'. Thus she blossoms:

Yellow daisies burst out
On my breast and thigh
at its every touch.

And yet she is not sure of the lover's affection, which seems to her 'beyond confines/of need and desire'. She is
unable to study his mind and 'thrilled shivering to think/
of what you think/alone in your sleep'. Notwithstanding such
a fear the consummation takes place and 'the forgotten
mouths' come together 'to taste the smiles'. Even when the
act is done, she hesitates to withdraw and continues in
that state for some time. Kumar's love poems offer a vast
range of images appropriate to the themes and moods they
display keeping in view the situations that warrant them.
In 'Kovalam Beach' the theme of sexual frustration, trans­
ferred to the elemental world of land and sea, finds a
symbolic expression:

. . . the sea's thrusts
break into surf
then recede
consummation thwarted
each time they
miss an ovary.

In 'My Correspondence' the past is relieved through powerf­
ully evoked images:

While you rose like some giraffe
I slouched over worms
Climbing up diamond-knots of wet grass.
Each night I limped into my loneself
Where the dead croaked like frogs.

And in the last section of the poem, the protagonist renounces
the co-shared sexual object and light out for new territories:

Now that I give you the rose to keep,
let me pass through the turn stile
into the open fields
where riderless horses whinny
under the Moon.

In sexual imagery, Kumar shows a greater imagistic skill.
The horse which symbolizes passion and sexuality is a positive
symbol in Kumar's poetry, whereas the rat which is associated
with garbage cans and symbolizes the failure of love and marriages, is a negative one. In 'My Co-Respondent', 'riderless horses whinny/under the red moon' symbolizes uncontrolled passion presaging violence. The image recurs in 'A Mango Vendor' and against the conventional image of 'the two white Moons' makes an impact on the minds of discernible readers. In 'To a Young wife', 'Arabian horses/snort around our bed/pawing into frosted holes', indicating unassuaged passion. In 'Coromandel Beach', Kumar describes 'half-clad tubectomized woman' collecting 'thumb-nail shells' from the 'mercurial sands' for a 'courtesan's torso'. The so-called sophisticated people, witnessing Cabaret dances grow frenzy, as the cabaret dancer 'slithers through wineglasses, kisses all the lepers on their flushed cheeks'. 'Nude Model in Art class' a different symbol, 'fox's eye' is employed. The cunningness of human beings to see through nudity is suggested in the following lines:

Limb by limb
the word peels off its pretence
till the fox's eye has been all.

The erotic sculptures of the sun temple at Konark is apprehended through the concrete visual images in the following lines:

These stones have wings
and darkness here flaps
into phosphorescence
washed by the semen
of Primeval gods
Playing under candid moon light
they froze into sculpture
as the sun broke in.
The sexual imagery is carried further, when love for the poet has become, 'a Pneumatic bout of love' as in 'Aftermath' and dreams have become 'aborative dreams' as in 'Kovalam Beach'. To him the bodies are 'diabetic bodies' and there is no orgasm in sexual but 'a semblance of orgasm'. Lusty-eyes ogling at the nude female model are termed as 'the fox's eye' and the female anatomy is likened to the vast horizon. Thus the Poet says,

The horizon's waist line  
Wrinkles around a dark shore  
Whence a tried eye peers  
at Vacancies.

(Nude Model in Art Class)

In Kumar's poetry one encounters erotic images, which bears a parallel to the sexual images of Kamala Das. For instance images like, 'Vaginal Creeks', 'Semen of Primeval gods', 'blue-veined breasts', 'Silken thighs' (reminiscent of 'silken girls' in T.S. Eliot's 'Journey of the Magi') and 'nipples smeared with gold dust powder/swing hysterically/round swaying waist lines' are very daring and unconventional. Monika Varma draws images from Botany to describe the love affair between two lovers and the resultant frustration due to separation. In a poem called 'You and I', she says,

Within me you lived, as I within your mind,  
While your hands, softer than petal dust,  
Caressed, and my blood thrilled a thin shrill scream,  

Today, bereft and alone, I walk that world  
Filled with drifted petals of childish laughter,  
While dropping flowers of infant dreams are with me.

Gauri Pant too uses botanical images in a poem called, 'Poem' to drive home the pangs of separation. As she puts it:
The man's voice hammers 
An invisible nail in my skull 
Pins a word, a name, a forgotten 
Incident, an unremembered moment 
In my guts.

A cloud of nostalgia engulfs me
In the desolate corner of the cafe 
Nostalgia of something I don't know 
of something I have not known.
But there is nothing
Only the dull throbbing pain
The drooping hibiscus on the window sill 
The dried seeds
The Chill biting wind.

The post-1960 Indian poets in English have given various 

kinds of treatment to death. Poem after poem, according to the way they perceive it. Hence they employ different 
techniques to treat death as a subject matter in their poetry. Gauri Despande's first poem in her first collection is entitled, 'Death' and here death is imagined not as some-
thing dreadful which ends life but as a lover who is much sought after. The poem is in four section and in the first, 

Death is imagined (Personified) as a lover, who is also the future husband. Thus the poet persona wishes to wait for him first as a 'tardy lover' and then would 'walk the seven steps with him', which suggests by implication a union with Death in marriage, like a Hindu bride. In the second section, she wishes to look back as and when she walks with him. Thus Death is imagined as a friend, a brother, and also a lover, 'whose neck I must fall now'. In the third, Death is visualised as winter, which follows the summer and takes the living unawares. She also asks a baffling question, 'What do we the living know/about you
the death?'. In the last section, she feels restless and is impatient to meet death as a blue kitty longs for the arms of the husband. Shiv K. Kumar's 'And Death shall speak with Many Voices' dramatizes a mood of calm acceptance of the fact of death:

The flamingoes may now
Pick the unresonant bones.
The ashes are waiting
for the stray winds.

The poem moves through a hard visual image, that of a body reduced to ashes by the flames of a pyre, reinforced by a number of auditory images:

Soft mallet strokes
On the navel
thrumming past the heart
by its soprana chords
and outshout its brazen denials
till the membrane pops to silence.

'Woodpeckers', Kumar's latest volume is haunted by death but Kumar refrains from moralising. In the words of J. Birjepatil', in 'Woodpeckers' death is an elderly gentleman, a father, a neighbour, or even the poet's own prematurely aged self that has one day casually ceased to be a part of the living world. The moment of transition from the living to the dead, the moment that writers of tragedy exploit dramatically, is totally ignored. And yet death is a living thing, it has the continuity of the burning ghats whose dead bodies appear with a fatal regularity'. Take for instance the following lines:

A child's lissom body
in a jute bag,
the warm ashes of a young courtesan,
and once I saw a man ferry across
on a sleazy raft to drop
his pet dog and bless
the sharks that carried the prize away.

('At the Ghats of Banaras')
The dignity of death, when one offers his father's dead body to the holy fire, is heightened when 'the priest chants louder for a generous tip'.

Based on a variation of the Valmiki legend, the death of a bird in Keki N. Daruwalla's 'Death of a Bird' brings the human involvement in the life of birds or it may be the other way around, the bird's involvement in human terms, which makes it a good poem where the poet and the hunter are one. The speaker in the poem shoots a male monal and for this sin, his wife and he meet with an accident and spend a night in a cave. However, they atone for the murder of the bird:

I broke my gun in two across the back of an ash-grey dawn. A brown bird left the crags flying strongly, and as its shadow crossed us it shrieked with fear and turned to stone dropping at our feet. It's the queen monal! we are accursed! she said. 'Just watch its eyes!' For though the bird was near dead its eyes flared terror like bits of dripping meat!

('Death of a Bird')

Death is imagined as a blue devil in Gauri Pant's poem, 'Blue Devils' which is associated with all kinds of ominous signs and ends love. As she put it:

Graveyard, dark and dismal - gloomy,
Hoot of an owl
Ominous silence.
Moonbeam peeps,
shrouded corpses shimmer,
Fresh graves await.
Love weeps,
Memory saunters,
Time plays truant.
Vision, dim and hazy,
Lost in oblivion.

('Blue Devils')
Hooting of an owl presages death leading to digging of fresh graves which wipes out 'Love', 'Memory' and vision. Even 'Time plays truant' as an accomplice of death.

O.P. Bhatnagar gives a new treatment to death in a poem called, 'Of Death and Life'. He maintains:

Death is not empty
It only empties itself
Out of life
Like a shadow
Thinning itself out
Of light
Without a mark.

The likening of life to light and shadow to death is quite appropriate in this context. In another poem entitled, 'Death must belong', Bhatnagar takes pity on 'Death' as nobody likes it and suggests that it be treated as an 'abandoned child'. In his words:

may yet be treated
as an abandoned child
confecting fancies of after joys
In a run away down of dark.

To his mind 'Death' does not 'belong' and he pleads as it were, that it should be adopted and patronised by man.

'Death' is welcome as it frees soul from the bondage of body. 'Death' harms only the 'poor body' and sets free the soul. Thus in 'The Suicide', Kamala Das says,

Bereft of body
My soul shall be free
.
Only the soul knows how to sing
At the vortex of the sea.

('The Suicide')

Death is not dreaded at all but welcome instead. This is a new approach to death.
Post-1960 Indian English Poets dislike the vague poeticism into which their predecessors had fallen and the romantic mind had degenerated. A new start has to be made. Thus they resolve to create a different kind of poetic diction, to give poetry a greater informality, to bring it closer to the spoken language. They are impatient with the rigours of metrical English verse. They now take liberty with form and language to make their poetry responsive to time and even enjoyable. What interests one above all in these poets is their use of the spoken word, the colloquial language and rhythm that has been absent from serious poetry. In using language and choosing stanza form these poets differ from one another as much as they differ from their predecessors.

While trying to acclimatize English language to an indigenous tradition, R.Parthasarathy employs a uniform three line stanza in his book of verse, Rough Passage. It is in free verse and the rhyme scheme is irregular. As the poet urges upon us to consider his above book of verse 'as one poem', on the surface level he integrates the parts by adopting a three line stanza with part of lines running into following stanzas, which gives a sense of continuity, linking stanza to stanza and sequence to sequence. Take for instance the following passages:
Our world, love, moves within
the familiar poles of eye, hand,
is eclipsed by the word
And words, surely are no more
than ripples
in the deep well of the throat

"Exile"

The Straw has come between us
I am living it all again
being accustomed to pain is of no help.
I confess I am not myself
in the present. I only endure
a reflected existence in the past.

"Trial"

I am my father now
The lines of my hands
hold the fine compass of his going;
I shall follow. And after me,
my unborn son, through the eye of this needle
of forgetfulness.

"Homecoming"

In the above quoted passages one notices not only a link
in the thought pattern between the stanzas but a closely
knit structure that well suits the theme of the poem.
Ramanujan uses a three line stanza form in 'Conventions of
Despair' with lines running into from stanza to stanza and
thought flowing with them making the poem an integrated whole.
Let us examine the following lines:

But, sorry, I cannot unlearn
Conventions of despair
They have their pride
I must seek and will find
my particular hell only in my Hindu mind.

This important statement is expressed through five lines
spreading over three stanzas. The free flow of ideas from
stanza to stanza is a technique which Ramanujan and
R.Parthasarathy use emphatically with varying degree of
success. Ramanujan uses this triplet stanza form in his
well known poem, "Small-Scale Reflections on a Great House" with a little variation. That is after four stanzas he employs a single line followed by four more stanzas and so on. The lines are not end stopped and in free verse. This is inevitable as he nostalgically harks back to his past after his long stay abroad. Ramanujan uses this triplet stanza form in "Old Indian Belief" with one variation where first line and last two lines as it were form a triplet.

He also writes in quatrains. His poem "Of Mothers, among other things" is in quatrains. He looks back in nostalgia:

My cold parchment tongue licks bark in the mouth when I see her four still sensible fingers slowly flex to pick a grain of rice from the kitchen floor.

Keki N. Daruwalla too uses this quatrains form with ease in a poem called, 'A city falls'. Daruwalla describes a city after invasion in touching words and with great success.

Now roads torn up by tank-tracks have been tarred, doctrine and dialectic have been pressed into the mud. The seasons have rolled over the landscape of heart rains have washed away the memories of blood.

Lila Ray too uses successfully this quatrains form in her better known poem, 'Love's Beggar'. Seven line stanza form seems to be a favourite with our poets. A.K. Ramanujan, and Margaret Chatterjee use it skillfully. Ramanujan's 'Obituary', 'Love poem for a wife' and Margaret Chatterjee's 'Homage to Boris Pasternak' are cases in point. Ramanujan too writes in 8 line stanza form (Ottavarima) in a poem like "Love Poem for a wife 2" with a single variation.
Since most of the post-1960 Indian English poets write in free verse in preference to rigours of metrical verse and rhyme, they write in any manner they like. They write with an absolute free hand employing two line, three line, four line, five line, six line, seven line and eight line stanza forms with or without any variation according to the theme of the poem. Even sometimes they do not make any stanza division and at others very irregular division of a poem into various stanzas. Some good poets like Kamala Das, O.P.Bhatnagar and Lila Ray don't make any formal stanza division in some of their important poems. Take for instance, Kamala Das's 'An Introduction', 'Summer in Calcutta', 'Convicts', 'In Love', 'Gino', 'The Fresks' and 'The Old Playhouse', O.P.Bhatnagar's 'Look Homeward Angel', 'Memory Frescoes' and 'Death by Law', and Lila Ray's 'Week-end' and 'Patience'. Perhaps these poets want to say 'their say' in one breath and that is why no pause or break is either possible or desirable. Hence the whole poem is of one piece with no stanza division.

Ramanujan's, "Poona Train Window" is a very interesting poem so far as its form is concerned. It is in 42 lines and an ascending order of stanza forms from 1 line to six line stanzas followed by an equal number of stanza forms in reverse or descending order. Thus the poem, it is important to note, begins and ends with one line stanzas. The thought pattern as it were moves with the corresponding stanzas.

Another very important poem of Ramanujan entitled,
'The Hindoo who does not hurt a fly or a spider either' is written in a unique two line stanza form, with a single variation. Ramanujan writes poetry in triplets and two line stanzas sometimes followed by a single line. These lines are free flowing lines. The idea is carried from line to line and very rarely they are end stopped. His latest volume of poems Second Sight is written both in triplets and two line stanzas with variations. Almost all the poems are written in free verse and the stanza pattern is irregular.

R.Parthasarathy's Rough Passage is written in triplets. The lines are not end stopped and metrical pattern is irregular. Sometimes the meaning is carried over to the following stanza as in the following poem:

My tongue in English chains,
I return, after a generation, to you
I am at the end
Of my dravidic tether,
hunger for you unassuaged.
I falter, stumble.

('Home Coming')

One great thing about R.Parthasarathy is that he always writes in triplets and does not alter the lines in a stanza.

Kamala Das writes in free verse and irregular stanza pattern. She puts three dots at the end of some of her poems to suggest that these poems could have expanded further. These three dots may be in keeping with Paul Valery's theory that 'a poem is never completed but abandoned'. Here are a few examples:
He clung
To her, he buried his arrogant face
Between her breasts, but a little later, sobbing
Like a hurt child, he said, I am old.
I am finished,
I cannot even make love...

('The Last Act'

As me why life is short and love is
Shorter still, ask me what is bliss and what its price...

('The Stone Age'

Rob me, destiny, if you must,
Rob me of my sustenance, but donot, I beg
of you, donot take away my thirst

('A Souvenir of Bone'

Here we shall be
Always a little bit lost, this cannot be our home.
When you sat before me my book between your hands,
I thought your hands the tamest seen, like a father's,
When handling his first born, and when you raised your
eyes,
Your surma-stained eyes, I thought I saw my future
within.
Yes, I thought I saw my future within your eyes...

('Of Calcutta'

Hang her
By her legs from a lamp post at dusk's tawny
Hour, so that the red red song clots in her
Vains and in her benumbed flesh the dance slows
down...

('The Survivor'

Kamala Das does not make separate stanzas in some of her poems.
This is a technique with her. She says her 'say' in one
breath and that is why the poem is written in one stanza
at a go. Since most of her poems are about love, this one
stanza form well suits her theme. Moreover, she writes in
irregular form and sometimes violating all norms of Prosody.
Needless to say that she writes in free verse.
Shiv K. Kumar and O. P. Bhatnagar write both in regular stanza pattern and one stanza form depending upon the subject matter of the poem. These two poets also show some concern for form and metre in their poetry.

Nissim Ezekiel is an exception in the sense that he regards form as important as content. He is not very happy with the carelessness and formlessness of contemporary free verse. He wishes to tighten it up, to return to rhyme and strict forms where these are appropriate for special effects. Above all, he seeks expression in poetry (especially in *Hymns in Darkness*) for the secret, subconscious currents of the mind. In Ezekiel form and content go together. He is equally at ease with free verse as with rigorous metrical verse.

The most perfect and balanced handling of form is seen in *The Unfinished Man* (1959). All the ten poems are regular in form, fully rhymed and all are written in regular stanzas and lambic metre. Here, prosody articulates the movement of feeling. There is economy of language, the rhythm is fluent and craftsmanship is superb. The sound pattern is astoundingly rigid. Take for instance the following stanza:

He came to me and this is what I said:
'The pattern will remain, unless you break
It with a sudden jerk, but use your head.
Not all returned as heroes who had fled
In wanting both to have and eat the cake,
Not all who fail are counted with the fake'.

[ 'Case Study' ]
The rhyme scheme is tight (abaab) and it suffers from rigidity, especially in the use of metre. 'Urban' though written in regular stanza pattern (each consisting of six lines) is marred by an unnatural rhyme-forced inversion and archaic diction at its climax:

But still his mind its traffic turns
Away from beach and tree and stone.
To kindred clamour close at hand.

'Enterprise' is in five line stanzas with rigid (ababa) rhyme scheme. 'Morning prayer' and 'Marriage' are in quartrain forms with regular rhyme schemes. 'A Morning Walk' though written in seven line stanza form, could not achieve technical perfection due to some awkwardness, in terms of metre, and stopping and forced rhyme in the second stanza. Similarly 'Love Sonnet' though better in its use of foot substitutions, has one awkward line of only four feet in its pentametre structure.

Ezekiel's mastery of traditional forms is also seen in The Exact Name. In some of the poems in this volume he wrote with a difficult but successful abab rhyme scheme. Poems like 'Poetry Reading', 'Art Lecture' and 'Event' are written in this form. 'The Visitor' is written in six-line stanza form. In 'Night of the Scorpion' Ezekiel makes a deliberate attempt at formal innovation by using a loose, apparently free verse narrative structure. There is colloquialism in diction and tone:

I remember the night my mother
Was stung by a scorpion. Ten hours
Of steady rain had driven him
to crawl beneath a sack of rice ....
As Christopher Wiseman has rightly suggested that 'On closer inspection the apparently free verse is not very free as regular iambic lines keep insisting upon their own pattern and the casual flow of the newly - loosened sound is several times violated and make awkward as the metrical pulse appears and tries to assert itself':

They clicked their tongues
With every movement that scorpion made
his poison moved in Mother's blood, they said...
I watched the holyman perform his rites
to tame the poison with an incantation.

In "Poet, Lover, Bird Watcher" we have a poem based on a standard iambic pentametre line in two closely rhymed ten-line stanzas. As Wiseman rightly observes that, 'the rich quiet density of the texture is most impressive and is helped by a new, but still minor, breaking of the formal pattern. For instance, in the twenty lines we find ten run-ons - a far higher proportion than in most of the poet's traditional poems - which allows the syntax much more scope in defining pace and emphasis, and in following emotional and intellectual rhythms in a natural way. The sentences are much longer than usual, exactly embodying the urgent but meditative movement of the experience. At the beginning of the second stanza the Pentametre breaks as something of the poet's visionary and metaphoric intensity takes over:

The slow movement seems, somehow, to say much more,
To watch the rarer birds, as you have to go
Along deserted lanes and where the rivers flow
In silence near the source, or by a shore
Remote and thorny like the heart's dark floor...
The lines have irregular feet, the run-ons and the juxtaposition of short and long sentences provide a rhythmic tension and sense of feeling and perceptions moving inevitably forward through complexity towards resolution, helped, not hampered, by the metrical pattern.

The poems like 'Philosophy,' 'Poetry Reading and 'The Visitor' are in regular stanza forms with varying lines and definite rhyme schemes. Similarly 'Art Lecture' is written in regular quartrain form with regular rhyme scheme of alternate rhymes. The lines are of varying length. The poem opens like this:

He starts with dates and ends with praise,
Relates a subtle episode,
Points a moral or turns a phrase
On some historic, formal code.

In 'India' is written in a mixed form - one notices the use of both rigorous metrical verse and loosened free verse.

**Latter-Day Psalms** is written in a different style. The free flow of lines in conversational words in irregular metre and blank verse heightens the meaning of the poem. In Ezekiel's poetry one notices three patterns: the use of traditional forms, in his two successful volumes, (The Unfinished Man and the Exact Name) a combination of traditional forms and free verse starting with some of the poems in the last mentioned volume and free verse in Hymns in Darkness and Latter Day Psalms. As he is more drawn to conversational style and tone, he used free verse instead of metrical verse. But it goes to his credit that his handling of free verse
never becomes chaotic and he holds the balance. There are
two line-three line end rhymes in his later poetry but that
goes well with the theme.

Last but not the least the use of language by the
post-1960 Indian English Poets is a marked feature of their
new technique. Kamala Das's elliptical style, the sonorous
style of O.P. Bhatnagar, R. Parthasarathy and A.K. Ramanujan,
the vigorous and deep engaging style of Nissim Ezekiel, and
Keki N. Daruwalla, the emotive style of Gauri Deshpande,
Gauri Pant, Lila Ray and Monika Varma, the impressionistic
style of Shiv K. Kumar (particularly his use of very learned
language in the manner of English metaphysical poets) are
distinctive features of their individual poetic techniques.
But very few of them are obsessed with the perfection of
language. Shiv K. Kumar's use of language bears the stamp of
his professional style and learning. Bhatnagar's poetry
though couched in good simple language is burdened with a
vast of body of allusions.

Take for instance, his poem, 'The God Game', and
one comes across the following allusions.

"Let not Hamlet brood too much on conscience
And Sartre, Genet, Brecht, and Ionesco
On the absurd in life
. . . . . . . .
. . . . . . . .
Man has been searching god
In blind images after Dionysus the Aeropagite
In blind images after Dionysus the Aeropagite
Or in Andri Alliati's emblems
Presented in faded silent pictures
Good enough for storing in archives.
. . . . . . . . . .

- 148 -
Though old Jung has his own way
Of paying tributes
Army honours its dead
In reverse arms."

Only A.K. Ramanujan, and R. Parthasarathy are concerned with the perfection of language. Ezekiel and to some extent Daruwalla strive to approximate the language in its spoken form. Ezekiel moreover believes in revising a poem endlessly till it achieves a kind of perfection, desires (it to have). Other poets, particularly women poets seem to believe in Kamala Das's diction:

Why not let me speak in
Any language I like? The language I speak
Becomes mine, its distortions, its queernesses
All mine, mine alone. It is half English, half Indian, funny perhaps, but it is honest,
It is as human as I am human, don't you see?
("An Introduction")

There seems to be an effort in the direction of developing their technique where they learn with some difficulty, to abandon styles inherited from others and to create their own style for their own purposes. Some poets do try to write in traditional forms. R. Parthasarathy seems to be determined to stick to his triplet stanza-form. My contention is that most of them are uncomfortable with regular metre and rhyme. Thus in their use of metre and rhyme they take care not to become too rigid and inflexible lest that should dominate and distort their content. These poets seem to say things in the most convincing manner in free verse and try to communicate their experiences by the
flexibility of syntax and new uses of language. This gives rise to the hope of the creation of a new Indo-English idiom.


9. ibid, P.141.

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