CHAPTER V

THE ACHIEVEMENT OF POST-1960 INDIAN POETRY IN ENGLISH
To make an assessment of the post 1960 Indian Poetry in English one has to take the whole range of Indian Poetry in English beginning with Henry Derozio's first publication *Poems* in 1827 into consideration for the sake of clarity, objectivity and authenticity. I have discussed the background of Indian Poetry in English at some length in chapter-I, and I need not repeat it here. But the fact is that there are people who are hopelessly divided in their opinion about the achievement of Indian English Poetry in general and post 1960 Indian English Poetry in particular. Broadly speaking there are two sets of opinion about it. One group outrightly condemns the poetry written before Indian Independence in 1947 and eulogizes post-Independence Indian poetry in English. Take for instance, R.Parthasarathy's pronouncement that Indian verse in English 'did not seriously begin to exist till after the withdrawal of the British from India'. In an introduction to his anthology, *Two Decades of Indian Poetry 1960-1980*, Keki N.Daruwalla writes:

'I must say here that it is fairly easy to denigrate whatever the earlier Indian poets wrote and then contrast their failures with modern Indian poetry in English'.

He further states that, 'the final indictment of the earlier poets will not be on the score of their prosody or their archaic, dandified georgianisms, but that they were
untouched by either the reality around them, drought, famine, plague, colonial exploitation or by the reality within, namely erosion of faith and the disintegration of the modern consciousness.³

But there are also critics who denounce the post 1960 Indian Poets and Poetry in English. Reviewing two anthologies Stranger times: An Anthology of Indian Poetry in English edited by Pritish Nandy and Ten Twentieth Century Indian Poets edited by R.Parthasarathy, R.W.Desai observes:

"Looking through the poems in these two volumes, one has the feeling that the writers would have been well advised to have started their poetic careers by writing nursery rhymes - I speak with all seriousness. After at least five years of this regimen, followed by another five heroic couplets in laudic pentameter they would have been ready to make a careful study of the discipline that a Missim Ezekiel - an exception in these pages under review - has attained to in two of his finest poems: 'Enterprise' and 'Philosophy' (Ten Twentieth Century Indian poets PP.30 and 31').⁴

Before making an assessment of the post 1960 Indian Poetry in English, I should, for the sake of arriving at a balanced view on the subject, dwell at some length on these two extremes view points held by two militant groups - traditionalists as well as modernists. V.K.Gokak in his introduction to The Golden Treasury of Indo-Anglian Verse and in his 'Studies in Indo-Anglian Poetry' traces the growth and progress of Indian Poetry in English and showers praise
on almost all the poets whom he includes in his anthology. To him Sarojini Naidu is the Yeats of India and Sri Aurobindo a great innovator in the art of versification. He classifies the Indian Poets in English before Independence into two groups: 'neo-symbolists' and 'neo-modernists'. The 'neo-symbolists' dive deep into mysticism and the 'neo-modernists' vision is coloured by humanism. C.D. Narasimhaiah speaks of Toru Dutt, Sarojini Naidu and Sri Aurobindo in admiration in his well known book, *The Swan and the Eagle*. He writes about Toru Dutt in the following words:

'Toru Dutt, for an Indian girl in her teens to demonstrate in English such acquaintance with Greek mythology, Christian and Hindu symbolism a rare feeling for words coupled with a reliance on speech rhythms, an enviable control of the Sonnet form and above all to vindicate with such seeming playfulness the strength of her own tradition - it is not surprising that Edward Thompson so often critical of Tagore (on whom he writes a whole book) should bracket Toru with Sappho and Emily Bronte'.

On Sarojini Naidu he writes:

'that where she succeeded in keeping her emotion somewhat tidy, her sentiment genuine and her rhythms faithful to the folk songs of South India she did compose some very good verses as in the poems, 'Corn Grinders', 'Indian Weavers', 'Festival of Serpents' (Song of Radha the Milkmaid and 'Leile'. In 'To a Buddha seated on a Lotus', the poet rejoices in inaccessible desire and heavenward hunger and in doing so she sums up the central philosophy of the
Vedanta*. C.D. Narasimhaiah is more eloquent in his praise of Sri Aurobindo, whom he considers not only as a distinguished poet but a critic too. He even goes to the extent of telling that English language has gained from Sri Aurobindo. He comes to this conclusion by comparing Sri Aurobindo with Joseph Conrad. Thus, he observes:

'Like Conrad who broadened the descriptive range of the English language, it may be said of Sri Aurobindo that he made the English language accommodate certain hitherto unknown (inconscient) areas of experience both through his prose work 'Life Divine' and through his epic, Savitri, not to speak of the numerous translations from Sanskrit Poetry and drama as well as his other less known but important works'.

Speaking of Sri Aurobindo A.K. Srivastava asserts that 'it is conveniently forgotten that Aurobindo is probably the only example of an Indo-Anglian Poet who nearly succeeds in hammering out an 'idiom in English which is peculiar and unique to the genius of the Indian people even if certain ingredients of his poetry such as high seriousness, epic grandeur, verbal artistry, heightened metaphor, today seem dated'.

M.K. Naik wonders: 'It is strange that certain Indian critics who reverently genuflect before 'The Wreck of the Deutschland', "Ash Wednesday" and "The Four Quarters" should turn up their (not always wellshaped) noses at these mystical lyrics, perhaps because some westerners, who probably have neither the time nor the inclination to try to understand
their complex symbolism have dismissed them (Aurobindo's works) as too ornate.\textsuperscript{9} In M.K.Naik's view Sarojini 'was a true nightingale who has had the misfortune to be branded a mere mina'.\textsuperscript{10}

Reacting to the poetry written in English by Indians before Independence two anthologists P.Lal and K.Raghavendra Rao\textsuperscript{11} assert that 'we claim that the phase of Indo-Anglian romanticism ended with Sarojini Naidu'\textsuperscript{11} and go on to say that the necessity to poetry of 'the private voice, especially because we live in an age that tends so easily to demonstrations of mass approval and hysteria. For this reason we celebrate the lyric form as the best suited for a capsule minded public'.\textsuperscript{12} Adil Jussawalla writes: 'To my mind... 'Savitri' a poem on the relation of the spirit to matter, unwinding like an interminable Sari through twelve books and about 2400 lines is one vast onion of a poem. The layers gradually fall away to reveal nothing.\textsuperscript{13} R.Parthasarathy writes," 'Savitri' fails as a poem because Ghose's talent and resourcefulness in the use of English were limited'.\textsuperscript{14} And Keki N.Daruwalla says, '...it is rather unfair to pick on Sri Aurobindo because no other Indian Poet was half as bad, none so nebulous or verbose or who so thoroughly confused, the inflated with the sublime'.\textsuperscript{15} In course of an article in \textit{The Humanities Review} (July-Sept. 1979), Parthasarathy says, 'It (Pre-1947 Poetry) has the vitality, or what was left of it, of an enslaved nation'.\textsuperscript{16} Rightly K.R.S.Iyengar takes Parthasarathy and Daruwalla to task in course of an article entitled "Indian Poetry in English: Yesterday-Today-Tomorrow" (\textit{The Literary Critèreion} Vol.XVIII No.3, 1983).
On the otherhand, there is another group who glorify modern Indo-English Poetry on Parochial considerations. Moreover some modern Poets turned anthologists - turned self-styled critics who denounce the poetry of Pre-Independence era, have an axe to grind - i.e., to win attention to post-Independence Indian English Poetry. There are purists (like R.W. Desai whom I have quoted in the beginning of this chapter), to whom the best modern Indo-English Poet would appear as Pseudo-Keats, second rate Tennyson, third-rate Hardy and fourth-rate Eliot. It seems to me that a good deal of poetry of our time can be highlighted without denying, denigrating the poetry of our predecessors or taking a Parochial and what George Woodcock calls 'literary incestuousness' attitude to recent Indian Poetry in English.

To my mind serious contemporary poetry in English came to be written not just after Independence but in the sixties and after. In short, the modern Indian English Poetry has come to mean post 1960 Indian Poetry in English. This poetry has already acquired a distinct character of its own. There appeared on the scene a large number of Indian poets in English in the sixties and after, making the task of the reader difficult to judge. In an interview not long ago, on being told that 'according to one anthology of Indian English Poetry, there are over 300 poets writing in English today', A.K. Ramanujan is reported to have said, "I say good luck to them. Three hundred is not a large number for such a long country" (The Humanities Review Jan-June 1981, P.12).
The post 1960 Indian Poetry in English has proved increasingly robust, varied, responsive to the time and enjoyable. It has acquired a distinct character and discovered its own voice. The voice is discovered by the poet's genius for intimately registering the idiom of his own world. Modernity in post 1960 Indian Poetry in English which essentially means a break with the past has three identifiable manifestations: one, a past oriented vision which is associated with a sense of loss and hopelessness, a sort of cultural pessimism, two, a future oriented vision associated with a desire to remake the world, three, a present oriented attitude, ahistorical, amoral, neutral, stoic, ironic, ambivalent, absurdist. This modernity has two modes of 'expression' - one, it might result in one turning inward going on one's 'Voyage within' two, it might result in an ironic observation of reality in 'Voyage without'.

Poets like A.K. Ramanujan, R. Parthasarathy and Kamala Das turn inward to get into their roots. There is a need to return to one's own linguistic tradition to write poetry effectively. Parthasarathy as it were, gives a clarion call to the Indo-English poets to return to their respective linguistic traditions. He wonders:

How long can foreign poets
Provide the staple of your lines?
Turn inward. Scrape the bottom of your past.

('Rough Passage')
It seems natural to conclude that a poet with a live cultural past behind him, aware of his roots and perhaps prejudiced by those roots, has a greater probability of writing significantly than one who has no knowledge of any Indian language other than English. An awareness of Indianness may be helpful to get at one's roots. I have in mind A.K. Ramanujan's *Selected Poems* (1976) in which some of the titles of the poems such as "A Hindu to his Body", "The Hindu: he doesn't 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' are indicative of the subject. Ramanujan tries to assimilate the Kanada and the Tamil traditions, where his deepest roots lie, into English. His determination to seek his roots is expressed in 'Conventions of Despair':

I must seek and will find
my particular hell only in my hindu mind.

'Prayers to Lord Murugan' is an 'imitation' of the *Tirumuru Karrupatai* in which the Tamil Poet, Nakkirur sings the praises of Murugan, the Dravidian god of youth, beauty, love and war. In Ramanujan's poem, Murugan is vividly invoked in the tradition of Tamil heroic verse. As Ramanujan says,

Lord of new arrivals
lovers and rivals
arrive
at once with cockfight and banner -
dance till on this and the next three hills
Women's hands and the garlands
on the chests of men will turn like chariot wheels
0 where are the cockscombs and where
the beaks glinting with new knives
at crossroads
When will orange banners burn
among blue trumpet flowers and the shade
of trees
Waiting for lightnings?

As Nissim Ezekiel observes that 'Paradoxically, the "Prayers to Lord Murugan" which promises a wholly Indian ethos remind us that Ramanujan does not believe in Lord Murugan or any other Hindu god. Lord Murugan is asked at the end of the sequence, to 'cure us at once of Prayers' which again can hardly be termed an Indian Prayer". The point is that Ramanujan takes an objective stance. This poem can be seen as being embedded in and arising from, a specific tradition.

As R.Parthasarathy rightly points out that 'It is the first step towards establishing an indigenous tradition of Indian English Verse'. If one closely follows Ramanujan's poetry he will come to a conclusion that 'Indianness' in his verse is enough to indicate a complex interaction of psychological forces kept under linguistic and formal control. His poetic sensibility operates more in terms of the landscape of the mind, the interior landscape in which memories of India are re-lived with a gusto which belongs to the present. Ramanujan has the courage of conviction. Take for instance, the following lines:

'It's time I told you why
I'm so gentle, don't hurt a fly'

('The Hindoo : he doesn't hurt a Fly or a Spider either')

- the irony is apparent. Moreover the word 'Hindoo' is spelt with a capital H and with a double oo, obviously implying irony against the foreign view of the Hindu which
can't even spell the word. In another poem, the Hindoo who 'reads his Gita and is calm at all events' is shaken in his mind when confronted with the knowledge of primitive evil in innocence ("on a little boy's face/the pre-historic yellow eyes of a goat"). The point I wish to make is that while trying to acclimatize the English language to an indigenous tradition like Kanada and Tamil, Ramanujan does not turn a blind eye to the illusions and delusions of Indian life. This to my mind, is a significant achievement in post 1960 Indian Poetry in English.

R.Parthasarathy seems to have taken a clue from Ramanujan to acclimatize the English language to an indigenous tradition like Tamil. In his own words: 'I saw my task as one of acclimatizing the English language to an indigenous tradition. In fact, the tenor of Rough Passage is explicit: to initiate a dialogue between myself and my Tamil Past. 'Homecoming', in particular, tries to derive its sustenance from grafting itself on to whatever I find usable in the Tamil tradition - from the Kural (3rd or 4th century) to the Nalayiradivvaprapantam (5th - 9th cent.). Something that had eluded me over the years, I was eventually able to nativize it in English - the flavour, the essence of Tamil mores". In his desire to write about the Tamil past Parthasarathy writes:
And so it eventually happened - a family reunion not heard of since grandfather died in '59-in March this year, cousins arrived in Tiruchchanur in overcrowded private buses, the dust of unlettered years clouding instant recognition, Later, each one pulled, sitting cross-legged on the steps. of the choultry, familiar coconuts out of the fire of rice and pickle afternoons. Sundari, who had squirreled up and down forbidden tamarind trees in her long skirt every morning with me, Stood there, that day, forty years taller her three daughters floating like safe planets near her. ('Homecoming 3')

The main purpose behind this act is to use images from the deposits of common tradition, so that the validity of the work is at once recognized by the reader.

Kamala Das too works out her emotional and sexual traumas in poems of unexceptionable frankness reminiscent of the medieval Sahaja poets who espoused free love as a means of realizing oneself. Traditionally, Nayar Women were sexually uninhibited because of the practice of marumakkathayam ('matrilineal system of inheritance and succession') and Kamala Das's bold treatment of sexual relations is an offshoot of her Nayar background. Thus the following comparison brings home the point. The classic expression is found in Chandidas (15th century):
What god is that
Who moulded me a woman?
I am always alone
Being married and watched.
Since falling in love
Is a disgrace for me,
I must then kill
My meaningless life.
I am not free
To open my mouth
But I am in rapture
With another man.  

With Kamala Das's:

It was not to gather knowledge
Of yet another man that I came to you but to learn
What I was, and by learning, to learn to grow, but every
Lesson you gave was about yourself, you were pleased
With my body’s response, its weather, its usual shallow
Convulsions. You dribbled spittle into my mouth you
poured

Yourself into every nook and cranny, you embalmed
My poor lust with your bitter-sweet juices.

While Ramanujan's mind seems to be perpetually busy probing
the areas of strength and weakness of his Hindu heritage,
Kamala Das highlights with boldness the sexual permissiveness
and uninhibition rooted in her native culture and produces
arresting effect on the readers. Parthasarathy is caught
in the dilemma of revealing his identity exposed to two
cultures - the Indian and the western. Following Kamala Das
Gauri Deshpande too writes uninhibited poems on love and sex.
In a poem called 'The Guest', Deshpande recalls her experience
after being jilted in love:

You are gone now.
The perfect mouth that kissed my words no
longer by,
And as the clouds heap and heap upon the ; west
I lie empty, barren and bereft.

Poets like Nissim Ezekiel, Keki N. Daruwalla, Margaret
Chatterjee and Lila Ray, who are unable to share the indige­
nous tradition take a different attitude, ahistorical,
amoral neutral, stoic and ironic. There expression results 
in an ironic observation of reality, 'Voyage without'. Here 
too, O.P.Bhatnagar joins them in making pointed, objective 
and thought-provoking observations on the reality around 
us. These poets too have tried and succeeded to some extent 
in evolving a new kind of idiom in post 1960 Indian poetry 
in English. Ezekiel has taken a lead in this direction. In 
a number of poems he has tried to catch the spirit of the 
actual character he is creating through his poetry and that 
has a tremendous dramatic effect on the readers. In trying 
to create a character who poses to be a patriot, Ezekiel 
brings out very aptly the funny situation in which the 
so-called patriot finds himself in:

I am standing for peace and non-violence. 
Why world is fighting fighting 
Why all people of world 
Are not following Mahatma Gandhi, 
I am simply not understanding 
Ancient Indian wisdom is 100% correct. 
I should say even 200% correct, 
But Modern generation is neglecting - 
To much going for fashion and foreign thing. 
Lend me the ears. 
Everything is coming - 
Regeneration, Remuneration, Contraception. 
Be patiently, brothers and sisters. 

('The Patriot')

Both in content and language the 'Indianness' of the poem 
is revealed beyond a shadow of doubt. The poet seems to 
underline the hollowness and hypocrisy of tens of thousand 
Indians who swear in the name of Mahatma Gandhi and the 
country only to delude the public. Infact, in the India of
our time the Mahatma (Gandhi) has become a convenient mask to hoodwink the people. Some of the burning issues of the day have been highlighted in the poem - right from the prospect of World Peace to internal disturbance, from family planning to prohibition and there is also the prophecy of utopian 'Ram Rajya' coming true. As for the language, the very first line of the poem (I have just quoted above) reveals it amply. Instead of simple present tense (I stand), the present progressing tense ('I am standing') has been used. This is a common trait with Indians to use present progressive tense when the simple present tense is needed. This is certainly Indian English and I dare say that educated people all over the country speak and often write in this particular fashion. Moreover, Indians very ineptly handle the question form, as Ezekiel shows in his poem. Instead of asking, 'Are you going?', the protagonist asks, 'You are going?'

In another poem called, 'The Professor' Ezekiel pursues his goal of creating a new idiom and bringing out the ironical situation in which the Professor and the country are caught at present. Thus the Professor says,

These are days of family planning.
I am not against. We have to change with times.
Whole world is changing. In India also
We are keeping up. Our progress is progressing
Old values are going, new values are coming.
Everything is happening with leaps and bounds.

If you are coming again this side by chance,
Visit please my bumble residence also.
I am living just on opposite house's backside.
While the first part of the quote refers to contemporary problem which India is now facing, the irony of the situation is not missed upon the readers. Particularly the line, 'Our progress is progressing' is highly ironical. The second part of the quote aims at creating a new idiom, what we may call Indian English. Not only the present progressive tense is used in place of simple present tense, but the use of the word 'backside' in place of behind in the last line, 'I am living just opposite house's backside' is to say the least, a risk. Because 'backside' means 'buttock' and by no stretch of imagination this word will replace 'behind' in English unless it be Indian English.

The typical Indian advertisement bordering on blasphemy is reproduced in a poem entitled, "Irani Restaurant Instructions":

All are welcome whatever caste
If not satisfied tell us
Otherwise tell others
God is great.

The alliteration in the third line heightens the irony of the poem and the first line betrays the caste system in Indian society. What is inexcusable is the dragging of the name of God to a restaurant advertisement and it seems to me nothing less than blasphemy.

In poems like 'GoodBye Party for Miss Pushpa T.S.', 'The Railway Clerk', 'Touching' and 'Family' Ezekiel brings out the ironic situation that underlines the poems and creates new idioms.
Pushpa Miss is never saying no.
Whenever I or anybody is asking
She is always saying yes,
and today she is going
to improve her prospects
and we are wishing her bon voyage.

(Good Bye Party for Miss Pushpa T.S)

This year my leave application
Was twice refused.
Everyday there is so much work
and I don't get overtime.
My wife is always asking for more money
Money, Money, where to get money?
My job is such, no one is giving bribe,
While other clerks are in fortunate position,
and no promotion even because I am not Graduate.

('The Railway Clerk')

We are touched
When a stranger is kind
How can we live
Without touching and being touched?

Touching is an art
it's the movement
to and from the heart.

('Touching')

We cannot find our roots here,
don't know where to go, sir
don't know 'what to do, sir
need a Guru, need a God
All of us are sick, sir.

('Family')

One notices in these poems there is a deliberate attempt
by the poet to evoke different situations, typically Indian
in nature and thereby he would get the readers' total
participation. Apart from involving the readers in these situations, Ezekiel seems to make them acquaint with new Indo-English idioms of his making and hopes in the process
to win acceptance for these idioms. It seems to me that Ezekiel has succeeded to some extent in this regard.
Keki N. Daruwalla's 'The Professor condoles' is set in the right direction of creating a new idiom. The death of a boy which occasions the poem is interpreted by the Professor in the light of the definition of tragedy and hence appears ludicrous. In the end the poem comes a full circle and the death is accepted as a tragedy. Behind this funny interpretation lies the effort of the poet to create a new idiom. Let us have a look at the beginning and ending of the poem:

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.

Tragedy today is private, insular:
a depraved enzyme,
in the belly of chance,
It digests you
Skull, hair, dentures and all!
Yes in an absurd scheme of things
accidents are the order
I am sorry, extremely sorry, young man
for the tragedy that overtook your brother,
and left you with this grief.
You won't know what to do with.

The conversation is typical Indian in character and the language used befits the conversation and drives home the desired effect. R. Parthasarathy's poem, 'Incident at Ahmedpore Station: A Letter' based on a newspaper report, also aims at creating a new idiom in Indo-English Poetry. Ramanujan too in his endeavour to dramatise the 'self' cultivates an elliptical style and a distinct Indo-English idiom. As he puts it:
I resemble everyone
but myself and sometimes sea
in shop windows,
despite the well known laws
of optics,
the portrait of a stranger,
date unknown,
often signed in a corner
by my father.

('Self-Portrait')

Similarly O.P. Bhatnagar has acquired a style of his own
where wit and irony go together to bring out a true sign
of Indianness in poetry. Take for instance, the following
lines:

'Man made temples for gods not for human beings'
('From Puri Temple')

A whole day's sinning and a coin in charity
Makes bad conscience in our country a rarity.
('Beggars can be choosers')

He has got into power with silmy ease
Acquiring property, shares and virtues new.
The total is more than an illusion.
('The Peacock')

What Bhatnagar attempts to do in these poems is to underline
the irony inherent in these statements and at the same time
exhibits the 'Indianness' that makes it poignant, touching
and even enjoyable. To display Indian sensibility (which
does not lie in a single thing) in poetry is no mean
achievement.

Commitment to life and to a country (particularly to
a place) has brought new dimension to the poetry of Ezekiel,
Margaret Chatterjee and Lila Ray. It is not only the
acceptance of but a positive identification with the place
that brings a new dimension to Indo-English Poetry. In 'City
Song' having climbed to a friend's terrace, Ezekiel looks
down at the view:
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. ...

This commitment has given rise to a number of important poems. A poem like 'In India' portrays 'not the nostalgic India of those singers who saw caste-marks on the brow of heaven, but the complex rapidly changing India of today with its dizzying incongruities and inequalities, its poverty and 'pretensions', and we are told:

    The Anglo-Indian gentlemen  
    Drank whisky in some Jewish den  
    With Muslims slowly creeping in  
    Before or after prayers.

For post 1960 Indian Poets in English India is not a song to be sung but a reality to be encountered with. Hence these poets are not nightingales to glorify the country but objective observers and critics to see 'the boredom, the horror and the glory' of it. Thus their poetry turned out to be 'a criticism of life' and this to my mind is a significant achievement. Because they speak to us in our own situation and thereby achieve our total participation in their works. To see life as it is rather than as it should have been, requires boldness and determination on the part of the poets. It is to their credit that they rise to the occasion and live up to our expectations in this regard.

In his essay, 'Future Directions! Indian Poetry in English' O.P. Bhatnagar observes:
'Politics today has replaced our religious mode of life. We are fast becoming concerned with a kind of nationalism that may define our role and responsibilities in the making of the destiny of our nation in future. The days of old loyalties to God are over. The new loyalties are towards our nation which give meaning and identity to ourself. The new Indian Poetry in English therefore must concern itself with problems facing our nation, nationalism and politics'.

We find the illustration of this fact not only in Bhatnagar's own poetry but also in the poetry of Keki N. Daruwalla, Margaret Chatterjee and a few others.

Daruwalla's and Margaret Chatterjee's poems are rooted in the Indian landscape. Daruwalla writes, 'I am not an urban writer and my poems are rooted in the rural landscape. My poetry is earthy, and I like to consciously keep it that way, shunning sophistication which, while adding gloss, takes away from the power of verse'.

The landscape of northern India - hills, plains and rivers - is evoked in many poems, notably in 'The Ghaghra in State', where the terror of the villagers at night as they fought the river is recorded with enthusiasm and appreciation. Similarly Kashmir landscape, the autumn season there touches the heart of O.P. Bhatnagar and Margaret Chatterjee. Bhatnagar's 'All Beautiful Things in the World are chinar', 'Kashmir Autumn Scene', and Chatterjee's 'Kashmir Valley' and 'Danihama' deal with such scenes. If Kashmir Valley reminds Chatterjee of the 'Sweet Scents of dusk/or 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?'

Indian birds, animals - the 'Squadrons of parrots/ streaking the skies', the 'tailor-bird on the Kikar tree', 'Pigeons who rivals architects', the 'crow who knows how to survive', 'the white winged albatross/who is fearless', the 'skylark whose courage and joy' leave their mark upon the sky. Margaret Chatterjee does not discriminate against the so-called inauspicious birds and for her the birds are symbols of the conquest of time and space. Thus she says in 'The albatross and the skylark':

I celebrate birds unsung,  
The vulture pursuing his dharma in a blighted tree,  
The great owl in the Chenar tree  
Who said that death comes on black wings ?  
Black is the colour of the crow  
And the crow knows how to survive  
I sing of birds to whom space belongs  
Birds who know no frontiers  
Who migrate  
Hoarding time in their bodies.

('The Sound of Wings' P.56)

Another achievement of post-1960 Indian Poetry in English is that by harking upon the personal failures, losses and agonies the poets express themselves in a confessional mode or assume some kind of imaginary 'self' or even put on mask to achieve the reader's total participation. Adil Jussawalla writes, 'the value of the confessional is that by exposing those dark areas which are normally concealed, it might touch some of the deepest points in the reader's own
The love poetry of Kamala Das, Gauri Deshpande, and Shiv K. Kumar just do that. However, the Kumar refuses to be identified as a confessional poet. In an interview with Atma Ram, Kumar comments:

"I have often been labelled as a 'confessional' poet, and indeed in tone and structure my poetry may be called 'autobiographical'. But what readers fail to comprehend is the fact that a poet often invent facts and experiences camouflaging them as 'real and authentic' - to achieve the reader's total participation. It's more a strategy of the imagination than a transcript of empirical reality".

But the fact remains that behind his love poems there lies the ground swell of frustration in love. Not only he but other post-1960 Indian poets in English write unconventional love poems with ease and the poems bear the stamp of their experience and imagination. They no longer write in the manner of Sarojini Naidu, the nightingale of India, who poured her love into a constellation of love poems called 'The Temple'. Kamala Das in the main a poet of love from the woman's point of view, at least from the point of view of simple, normal and adult woman to whom the centre is the act of love. The hot blooded sincerity of feeling, the complexity of moods, the sense of urgency and above all a wider dramatic range, make her love poems animating and enjoyable. Nissim Ezekiel's 'Passion Poems', and 'Nudes', Daruwalla's 'You were the first,' Shiv K. Kumar's 'To a Prostitute', 'Kovalam Beach', 'Aftermath' and 'To a Young Wife',
C.P. Bhatnagar’s ‘Adam and Eve’ and A.K. Ramanujan’s ‘To Wife’ are some of the outstanding poems of love in post 1960 Indian poetry in English. The point to note here is that these poets are unconventional in their attitude to love and hence their love poems arise a kind of curiosity in the heart of the readers.

For instance, Nissim Ezekiel goes back to the past and holds Sanskrit Poets as his models. The words like ‘Caressing’, ‘breasts’, ‘buttocks’, ‘hips’ evoke a sense of sensuality. Kamala Das goes a step ahead by using words and lines like, ‘musky sweat between the breasts’, ‘the jerky way he urinates’ and ‘menstrual blood’. Kumar, and Bhatnagar too use sex as a possibility for transcending the limitations of existence. For instance, in ‘A Dark Mood’ Kumar successfully transcends the sex attitudes to cosmic attitude:

How can we exchange nudities to night
When the shells on the ocean’s bed
are waiting for the dead?
The corpse this morning
Slumped at the cross road
Crying after a speeding car
and the wood peckers
hammering away at the phantasms.

To my mind some post 1960 Indian poets in English have shown mastery of verse in ironic social comment. Poets who excel in this area are Nissim Ezekiel, A.K. Ramanujan, Shiv K. Kumar, O.P. Bhatnagar and Keki N. Daruwalla. They are, to speak the least, brilliant commentators on the Indian scene. Politics, marriage, love, Black marketing, riots, joint family, rituals, brain drain and a number of social events come in for criticism in their poetry. But I should hasten to add that they are not
propagandaists. What they intend to do is to create an awareness among the people and to make them alive to the problems of the day and that is just a strategy to get their poetry more and more acceptable and enjoyable too. Post-1960 Indian poets in English should be complimented on being aware of the change that takes place in the society daily and this sharpens their sense of adaptability. Remanujan tells Shama Futehally in course of an interview:

'...that I am constantly changing, things are constantly changing... Sometimes I feel, I can't judge anything, because by the time I come to judge it, it has changed and I have changed...' 27 Most of the poets are of the same view. For Daruwalla morality (in India) is 'the Prudish pronounced with a Prurient grin' and religion is 'the devil's tail-bone and original sin'. Inevitably a national tradition of overwhelming emphasis on morality and religion leads to this condition now:

'If we had plague
Camus-style
and doctors searched for the virus
there would be blackmarket in rats'.

Nissim Ezekiel too changes his earlier view on Indian women as stated in his poem 'In India' in course of an article entitled 'What is Indian in Indo-English Poetry?' (Osmania Journal of English Studies 1983). As Ezekiel puts it, 'The anger and bitterness is a kind of concern and a member of a third ethnic group who shall be nameless, is guilty of the following lines about a new year party in Bombay with 'Six nations represented':
'The wives of India sit apart,
They don't drink,
They don't talk,
Of course, they don't kiss'.

Whereas, the poet complained,

'The men are quite at home
among the foreign styles'.

The situation has changed, some would say for the worse, since that poem was written in 1962. The wives of India no longer sit apart, they drink, they talk too much and, of course, they kiss'.

While assessing post 1960 Indian Poetry in English, one need not be blind to its shortcomings. This poetry is largely descriptive and analytical but not very evocative. The poets seem to be deficient in creating new images. Shiv Kumar who has exhibited a kind of maturity in creating new original images uses American imagery (Mississippi long hair) in describing Indian women. Perhaps he has in mind an American audience while employing such images. Most of the poets only use stock oriental images. Even Ezekiel in his recent poems seems to accept the ancient Sanskrit poets as his model. Another shortcoming of this poetry is that there is no adequate use of myth in it. Kamala Das incidentally uses the myth of Radha-Krishna in a poem called 'Radha Krishna' and talks of Mira Bai in 'Vrindavan' who relinquished the ties of marriage in search of Lord Krishna, the eternal lover who is also the epitome of the fullest consciousness that a human being can contemplate. The use of western myths and imagery should be limited to make room for Indian myths and imagery. Why should they talk of Cupid, when our mythical god of love,
Kamadev is there? Why should they talk of Cleopatra or Helen, when our Shakuntala, Draupadi and Sita are there? Why should they talk of Nightingale or Daffodils, when our Cuckoo and lotus there? The point in question is that images and myths instead of being imported and plagiarized, should be drawn from Indian life and Indian myths must be exploited inorder to make Indo-English Poetry more purposeful. Of course, there are poets like Ramanujan and Partha-sarathy, who seem to be cautious in employing images while dealing with themes like cultural interaction between the East and the West. Ramanujan excels in handling images and his poetry is by and large image oriented. One hopes others will emulate them in creating new original images drawn from our country. Post 1960 Indian Poets in English seem to be incapable of handling rhyming lines and regular metres. They set their sail in free verse. Only Ezekiel seems to handle both regular metre and free verse with equal ease. There is nothing wrong to write in free verse but with some of them it turns out to be chaotic and rhyme appears to be crime. Of course, some of them like O.P. Bhatnagar, Ramanujan, Parthasarathy, Shiv K. Kumar, Daruwalla and Margaret Chatterjee handle free verse with competence.

These poets seem to be incapable of writing long poems and their vision is limited. Except Parthasarathy's Rough Passage and Ezekiel's Hymns in Darkness (I am not concerned with Jayanta Mahapatra's Relationship and Arun Kolatkar's
Jeluri here) there is no long poem by these poets. These poets seem to be incapable of seeing beyond the contemporary situation. Their poetry though evoke a sense of urgency and takes the facts all around us into its compass, it very rarely transcends time. Another drawback of our poets is that they are silent on their contemporaries, and when they do speak they tend to be laudatory. Ezekiel’s praise of Daruwalla and Parthasarathy’s comments on Ramanujan are cases in point. This kind of attitude does harm to the growth of Indo-English Poetry. Moreover some of the poets turned anthologists cum critics have taken a very Parochial view of the whole body of Indian Poetry in English and made a few misleading statements. One has in mind Parthasarathy’s (ed) Ten Twentieth Century Indian Poets and Daruwalla’s (ed) Two Decades of Indian Poetry in English. Although attempts have been made by poets like Ezekiel, Parthasarathy, Ramanujan and Daruwalla to create a new Indo-English idiom, our poets have a long way to go. Unlike Australian, West Indies and African Poets who have evolved their indigenous idioms, our poets still struggle with British idiom and at times takes hints from American poets, we have yet to stand on a firm ground of Indo-English idiom.

While concluding I would like to make a few observations on the position (status) of post-1960 Indian Poetry in English. For far too long, and at insufferable length, the validity and viability of the poetry written by Indians in English has been debated, some times ironically enough - by some of the poets themselves and their admirers who seem to have an
endless capacity to agonize over this non-issue but more often by the detractors of this comparatively nascent art form who have used every gadget in western critical apparatus to try to destroy it. Questions like the 'locale' of Indian Poetry in English and it's audience have been raised endlessly and fruitlessly. Even people like Khuswant Singh has tried to further classify Indian Poetry in English to Panjabi Poetry in English and O.P.Bhatnagar has very rightly contested this point in his essay. The situation of Indian Poetry in English: An Introduction' and brushed aside this narrow classification. The fact is that Indian Poetry in English (for that matter Indian literature in English) is Indian first and anything else afterwards. It's base is Pan-Indian and it has audience allover the country. So the debate over its 'locale' and audience seems to be futile.

Serious Indian English Poetry began only in the nineteen sixties and after. There has not been enough time for a tradition to take roots. Moreover, the Indian English poet is concerned with the 'Indianness' of his experience. The validity of Indian English Poetry depends on the creation of a new idiom - let us say, Indian English idiom distinct from the idioms of the writers all over the world who write in English. African writers in English, Australian writers in English and Carribean writers in English have discovered their own English idioms and established the validity of their literatures. Thus there is a demand, as it were, for the creation of an Indian English idiom, to give authenticity
and an identity to post 1960 Indian Poetry in English, independent of and different from the world literatures written in English including English and American literatures. To my mind post 1960 Indian poets in English particularly Nissim Ezekiel, Kamala Das, Shiv K.Kumar, Gauri Deshpande, Keki N.Daruwalla, O.P.Bhatnagar and a few others have succeeded to some extent in creating a new Indian English idiom.

In Ezekiel's poetry one encounters a number of Indian words (Hindi words in particular) in italics. Words like 'goonda*, 'guru', 'Indirabhen', 'Rama Rajya', 'ashram', 'burkha', 'bhikshusks', 'Chapati', 'Pan', 'mantras' and a few other Indian words are used with a purpose to create new Indian English idiom. Kamala Das and Shiv K.Kumar use a new kind of unconventional vocabulary in their love poetry. A new Indian English idiom hitherto unknown in English poetic diction is used in poetry. Words like 'menstrual blood', 'the musky sweat between the breasts', 'the jerky way he urinates', 'my Pubis', 'lesbian', 'hetero', 'frigid', 'queer', 'Sandal scent' 'lipstick', 'eunuch', 'blood-stain', 'schizophrenia', 'eczema', 'anaemia', 'ischemia', 'urine' and the likening of husband's hand to a 'hooded snake' that 'clasps my pubis' suggesting violence and the likening of heart to an empty cistern 'Waiting through long hours fills itself with coiling snakes of silence' and the likening of love to a 'Swivel door', 'When one went out another came in' are certainly new to Indian English Poetic diction.
Indian English Poetry has now taken for its theme various Indian subjects from legend, folklore, to contemporary Indian situations. Our poets no longer sit in ivory towers and sing about birds and Cuckoos. They are alive to their contemporary situations. They are conscious artists who 'look before and after' and try to bring innovations both in form and content of their poetry. They are conscious of creating a new idiom and employing new imagery in their poetry. There is variety in the post 1960 Indian Poetry in English. They do not write poetry in the conventional English Poetic diction but in a live Indian English language. They speak to us in our own situation and in a language that is spoken, heard and understood by the English educated Indians of our country. Indian English Poetry is as much Indian as any other poetry—say Oriya, Bengali, Hindi. Poetry is or ought to be. The existence and validity of Indian Poetry in English are beyond question now. It has not only come to stay in India but has also found recognition abroad. For example, it has gone as far as Leeds, Chicago and Adelaide. It has been offered as a course in some British, American, Singapore, and Australian Universities. Some of our poets have gained recognition and prizes abroad. Indian Poetry in English is no longer 'Matthew Arnold in a Saree' or 'a dog walking on its hind legs' and post-1960 Indian poets in English have discovered their own voices and developed their Indian sensibilities. One happy aspect of post-1960 Indian Poetry in English is that it has been able to escape the clutches of Anglo-American influence. The earlier influence of Eliot
Pound, the later Yeats, Wallace Stevens, Dylan Thomas, Ted Hughes, Robert Lowell, Sylvia Plath and Rotheke has now been overcome. This poetry has now been taken seriously at home and courses are offered on it at various Indian Universities. This has also been accepted as a topic for M.Phil and Ph.D. dissertations both at home and abroad. The National Akademi of Letters, New Delhi has honoured five of our poets - Jayanta Mohapatra for his book, Relationship in 1981 and Nissim Ezekiel for his book of verse, Latter Day Psalms in 1983, Keki N. Daruwalla for Keeper of the Dead in 1984, Kamala Das for Collected Poems in 1985 and Shiv K. Kumar for Trapfalls in the Sky in 1987. Some of our Indian English Poets have also won the Commonwealth Poetry Prize. Indian Poetry in English has come to stay along with Poetry written in other Indian languages. This Poetry can now stand comparison with the poetry written in English in the Commonwealth as well as in the Third World Countries. The future of Indian Poetry in English is immense.
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