Chapter III

Indian English Poetry
Definition

Indian English Poetry\(^1\) may be defined as that body of poetry written in the English language by the Indians.\(^2\) Indians write creatively in the various languages of India.\(^3\) Their writings constitute the poetry of the respective regional languages. All these several poetry, including Indian English Poetry, collectively form what is known as Indian Poetry.

History

Indian English Poetry is now approximately one hundred and seventy five years old, if we remember the date of the publication of Henry Louis Vivian Derozio's book of poems entitled Poems that appeared in 1827. Since then a considerable poetry written in the English language by Indians has been produced.

Derozio (1809-1831) was in fact only half - Indian, his father being a Portuguese and mother, Bengali. Nevertheless, he is accepted as the first Indian poet in English.\(^4\) In his short –

\(^1\) cf. M.K. Naik, A History of Indian English Literature (New Delhi : Sahitya Akademi, 1982), p. 5. The nomenclature usually applied to Indian English literature such as 'Anglo - Indian', Indo - Anglian' and 'Indo English' was finally decided when the Sahitya Akademi accepted 'Indian English Literature' as the most suitable appellation for this body of writing. Hence its poetry may be designated as 'Indian English Poetry'.
\(^2\) cf. Ibid. p.2. Indian means 'by birth, ancestry or nationality ---possible exceptions A.K. Coomarswamy and R.P. Jhabwalla'.
\(^3\) cf. K.R. Srinivas Iyengar, Indian Writing in English (New Delhi : Sterling Publishers Private Limited), p. 3. 'Indian literature comprises several literatures Assemese, Bengali, Gujrati, Hindi, Kashmiri, Kannada, Maithili, Malayalam, Marathi, Oriya, Punjabi, Sindhi, Tamil, Telgu, Urdu, not to mention Sanskrit ---and Indian writing in English is but one of the voices in which India speaks'.
life of twenty two years, Derozio published two poetical works: *Poems* (1827) and *The Fakir of Jungheera: A Metrical Tale and Other Poems* (1828).

Derozio was an ardent lover of India and his poems notably "The Harp of India" and "To India" express his love for the country and his disgust with her enslaved condition. Although derivative in style and form he manifested pioneering qualities in his verse that established his Indian identity.\(^5\)

Kashi Prasad Ghose (1809 -1873), a product of Hindu College, published a volume of verse, *The Shair of Minstrel and Other Poems* (1830) just two years after Derozio's, *The Fakeer of Jungheera*. Like Derozio, Kashi Prasad Ghose was also an ardent lover of India and her natural scenery. However, his was also derivative and imitative poetry made up mainly of conventional descriptions and tedious moralizing.\(^6\) Matching in mediocrity are Rajnaraian Dutt's *Osymyn: An Arabian Tale* (1841) and Shoshee Chunder Dutt's miscellaneous *Poems* (1848).

Michael Madhusudan Dutt (1824-73) wrote two long poems: *Visions of the Past* (1848) and *The Captive Lady* (1849). His other publications include, *Ratnavali* (1858), translations of *Sarmista* (1859), and the farce *Is This Called Civilization ?* (1871). Madhusudan also wrote, like Derozio and Ghose, under the active influence of the English romantics. Both

\(^5\) Ibid., p. 13.
\(^6\) Iyengar. opp. cit., p. 37.
Aurobindo and Nobbo Kissen Ghose (1837-1918), the first Indian English poets to write about mystical experience, a major trend in Indian poetry, praised Madhusudan and played tributes to him.

Madhusudan Dutt's *Visions of the Past* (1848) gives us his own version of the story of *Paradise Lost*. A poem invested with the 'sublime' theme and diction of Milton, with its story of the Temptation and Fall of Adam and Eve, sounds factitious and forced in the hands of Michael Madhusudan Dutt. But in *The Captive Lady* Dutt makes a conscious effort to turn to Indian theme in which he narrates the story of the great Rajput warrior king, Prithviraj Chouhan and his abduction of the daughter of the king of Kannoj in great chivalric manner and his unsuccessful battle with the Muslim invader resulting in his own death and that of his queen.\(^7\)

The Dutt *Family Album* (1870) is a collection of poems written by three brothers – Govin Chunder Dutt (1828-1884), Her Chunder Dutt (1831-1901), and Greece Chunder Dutt (1833 - 1892) – and their cousin, Omesh Chunder Dutt (1836-1912).\(^8\)

The Dutts were high-caste Hindus who had embraced Christianity. One of the four poets, Govin Chunder Dutt, the father of Toru Dutt, had been to England with his family and had thought of permanently settling there. More than any of his collaborators, it was Govin, who was touched by Christian

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\(^7\) M.K. Naik. opp. cit., p. 37.
\(^8\) G.J.V. Prasad. opp., cit., p. 25.
sentiments and found his themes either in the Christian theology or in the narratives drawn from the scriptures. He was the first poet to introduce the introspective vein in the poems like "Romance" and "Wordsworth".

The verses of Her Chunder had already appeared separately as Fugitive Pieces (1851) and, as the title suggests, he wallowed in sloppy sentiment as an escape route. Greece Chunder kept Wordsworth as his model. Besides contributing to the Album, he published, in 1887, a separate volume of poetry entitled Cherry Blossoms. In this volume, several of the earlier contributions to the Album were reprinted, but some of the poems were fresh ones. The poet shows a special inclination towards sonnet form, and out of a total of 165 poems contained herein, 70 are sonnets.

Omesh Chunder, the cousin, was attracted in the main, by the stirring incidents of Indian legend and dreamt of the exploits of our native princess in his poem The Chief of Poukurna.

The Dutt Family Album contained 197 pieces out of which Govin's contribution consisted of 66 poems, Omesh's 73 poems, Greece's 47, and Her's only 11. The aim of the Album as the joint authors declared in the preface was to be a piece

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of 'a curiosity---of foreigners, natives of India ---educated out of England.'

The *Album* throws sufficient light on the atmosphere of Govin's house, an ideal atmosphere needed for Aru and Toru Dutt. Govin himself was a poet of some repute. His independent works are: *The Loyal Hours* (1876) and *Cherry Stones* (1881). His wife Kshetramani, was chiefly responsible for giving taste to her daughters. Being born and bred in such a highly cultured family, it was but natural for Aru and Toru to be skilled writers.

In a short period of creativity, Aru Dutt wrote eight poems in all which are included in Toru's *A Sheaf Gleaned in French Fields*. On reading her fine rendering of Victor Hugo's "Morning Serenade" Edmund Goose felt a sense of 'surprise and almost rapture' and exclaimed: 'When poetry is as good as this, it does not matter whether Rouveyre prints it upon Whatman paper, or whether it steals to light in blurred type from some press in Bhowanipure'.

However, the most remarkable poet to emerge during the period was Toru Dutt (1856-77). The third and youngest child, born a Hindu, Toru Dutt was baptized along with other members of her family in 1862. She was taught English at a tender age and took to reading and music in her cloistered

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10 Ibid. p. 19.
11 Ibid. p., 20.
upbringing. The westernized father sent her to France to study French when she was barely thirteen years old. She was shifted to England after one year. One of her earliest creations was an unfinished love story Bianca, set in the nineteenth century England. A Sheaf Gleaned in French Fields (1875) is a translation of French verse by two sisters, Toru Dutt and Aru Dutt. Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan (1882), published five years after Toru’s death, render in verse the lives of Indian epic heroes and heroines. Here, Toru Dutt makes an effort to ‘reveal ... the soul of India through the medium of poetry by narrating stories sung in divine poetry thousands of year ago.’ The Ballads breathe ‘a Vedic solemnity and simplicity of temper.’ Prof. C.D. Narsimhaiah is of the opinion that so well-known are these great talks of India that I should have no hesitation to prefer them to anything of their kind in English by any one else and I should like them read by children of all lands including our own’.

Her poem “Our Casuarina Tree” is found in many anthologies and often signaled out as the first major Indian English Poem. “Our Casuarina Tree” heads a long list of distinguished poems written by Indian English poets. These

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poems concretize their nostalgia while affirming their Indianess “Our Casuarina Tree” signals strongly Toru Dutt’s sense of her roots, and the beginning of her exploration and expression of her commitment to her Indian self and cultural environment.

Manmohan Ghose (1869-1924) in his own life time published only a single collection of poems, *Love Songs and Elegies* (1898). *Songs of Love and Death* was published posthumously in 1926. His more ambitious works – a blanks verse epic on the Greek myth of Perseus, a long poetic play *Nollo and Damyanti* and *Adam Alarmed in Paradise* remained incomplete.\(^\text{16}\) Ghose mostly wrote on the English country side and *Nollo and Damyanti* remains his only attempt at handing Indian poetic material.

Manmohan Ghose’s younger brother, Aurobindo Ghose (1872-1950) also known as Sri Aurobindo strongly identified himself with his motherland, becoming a revolutionary in the cause of its struggle for freedom. In his nationalistic fervour he wished for the complete weeding out of English. Jailed, acquitted and released from prison, he finally settled at Pondicherry to start a new life of renunciation and spiritualism.

Sri Aurobindo was a man of multi-di-mensional personality, a great scholar and a prolific writer. His works were collected

\(^{16}\) K.R. Srinivas Iyengar, opp. cit., p. 27.
and edited in the thirty volume Sri Aurobindo Birth Centenary Library (or SABCL for short).\textsuperscript{17} The bibliography of primary works in Vol. 30 lists 101 works by Sri Aurobindo in English published during his life time and afterwards. Out of these, the following, in chronological order, are collections of poems, written originally in English (works marked with asterisk are fragments or incomplete poems).

\begin{quote}
\textit{Songs to Myrtilla} (1895; rpt. 1925)
\textit{Urvasie: A Poem} (C. 1896)
\textit{Baji Prabhou} (1910)
\textit{Chitrangada} (1910)
\textit{Ahna and Other Poems} (1915)
\textit{Love and Death} (1921)
\textit{Six Poems of Sri Aurobindo} (1934)
\textit{Poems} (1941)
\textit{Collected Poems and Plays} (1942)
\textit{Poems Past and Present} (1946)
\textit{Last Poems} (1952)
\textit{Savitri} (1954)
\textit{More Poems} (1957)
\textit{Ilion} (1957)
\end{quote}

All these except \textit{Savitri} are included in Volume 5, SABCL, and \textit{Savitri}, with Sri Aurobindo’s letter on it appended, is contained in volumes 28 and 29.

Sri Aurobindo has a record of poetic achievement without a parallel in our day. Urvasie and Love and Death are his beautifully articulated narrative poems, while Baji Prabhau is a poem of action; Perseus, The Deliverer is a blank verse drama which is striking in its setting and prophetic in its appeal; "Thought the Paraclete" and "The Rose of God" are among the finest mystical poems in the languages.

Sri Aurobindo has successfully employed classical quantitative metres to his own purpose and accomplished new harmonies in the use of his long poems like Ahna and Ilion. His Savitri: A Legend and a Symbol has created a new kind of poetry. It is a work running to 24,000 lines in 49 cantors, spread over 12 books. It impresses us not only by its size but also by the audacity of its conception and the lavish amplitude of its execution. One is awe-struck by the rounded fullness of the poem; one feels that nothing that could relevantly be said has been left unsaid. Almost fifty years a-growing Savitri was shaped and reshaped in the fires of successive inspiration till it achieved at last an adequate splendour of revelation. Aurobindo said that Savitri was 'an attempt to catch something of the Upanishadic and Kalidasian movement, so far as that is possible in English.' The iambic blank verse of Savitri dispenses with the complicated structure of the Miltonic blank verse paragraph, and rather builds each line itself as a sparkling and almost self-sufficient unity. Even so as Poetry Review remarked, in total
impact Sri Aurobindo's blanks verse is Miltonic. Just as the *anushtup* in Valmiki's hands proved a fit vehicle for the immortal strains of the *Ramayana*, so too this new-forged iambic line, each line by itself 'in its own mass and force', - metallic in its finish and clarity and capable of wonderous delicate handling at the hands of a Master,- has served Aurobindo's purpose admirably.¹⁸

*Savitri*, nevertheless, has not been accepted as such by some poets and critics prominent among them being P. Lal, Nissim Ezekiel, Adil Jussawala, R. Parthasarathy and K.N. Daruwalla. P. Lal who condemned it as 'greasy, weak – spined and purple– adjectived' and advocated strongly in favour of poetry which 'must deal in concrete terms with concrete experience' (Lal,1969:11) however, modified his stand, on second thoughts, and along with a few others issued the following statement:

Sri Aurobindo happens to be our Milton, and Toru Dutt, Sarojini Naidu - - our Romantic birds. They provide sufficient provocation to experiment afresh, set new standards, preserve what is vital in the tradition and give a definition to the needs of the present.¹⁹

While reviewing K.R. Srinivas Iyengar's book on Sri Aurobindo in the *Sunday Standard*, Nissim Ezekiel denounced *Savitri* as 'a confused unconscious parody of the worst features of English rhetorical style grafted on a degenerate Eastern mysticism' (*Sunday Standard*, 14 July 1967). It is however, difficult to accept such harsh views, and Sri Aurobindo's *Savitri* and his other mystical and religious poetry which form an impressive corpus of Indian English Poetry can not be dismissed so easily as Ezekiel and others have done. *Savitri*, in fact, 'is coming to be hailed the world over as a truly remarkable poetic testament characterized by sublimity of conception, opulence of imagery and spiritual potency'. What is this symbolic epic, after all, except vision and revelation, the apocalypse of the passage from darkness to light, from present nightmare death-in life to a life of fulfillment governed by sovereign truth consciousness. And so the poem the crest jewel of modern Indian poetry- blazes forth the culminating assurance:

The earth shall stir with impulses sublime,

Humanity awake to deepest self,

Nature the hidden godhead recognize

The spirit shall take up the human play,

The earthly life become the life divine. (*Savitri*, p. 796)

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Surely, along with Rabindranath Tagore, Sri Auribindo was one of the major influences on poets writing in the first half of the twentieth century.

Rabindranath Tagore (1961-1941) wrote only one poem, *The Child*, in English. All other works of his, available in English are translations. Below is furnished a list of the works of Tagore, arranged chronologically, which he himself translated in English:

- *Gitanjali* (1912).
- *One Hundred Poems of Kabir* (1914).
- *Sacrifices and Other Plays, Personality, Nationalism* (1917).
- *Lover's Gift, Crossing* (1918).
- *The Fugitive and Other Poems* (1921).
- *Creative Unity* (1922).
- *Fire Flies, Letters to a Friend* (1928).

*The Child*, a poem in ten sections, was composed by Tagore in a fury of creative imagination in the course of a single night. Below is given a section wise summary of this poem:

1. The first section opens with an evocation of Night, a nightmarish vision of all our mangled yesterdays leading up to the present Inferno.
II. Next, there is the vision of the Man of Faith on the hill amid the snow-white silence.

III. In the third section, as the day dawns, the Man of Faith gives the call to the pilgrimage.

IV. The pilgrims gather from all quarters.

V. The long journey begins.

VI. Another night, when one of the pilgrims kills the Man of Faith as a false prophet.

VII. When the night ends, the pilgrims see their Victim, feel ashamed, and continue their journey.

VIII. The pilgrims, led invisibly by their dead leader, march on even during the night.

IX. They reach a hut, and the poet of the unknown shore sings: 'Mother, open thy gate!'

X. The door opens, it is sunrise of the Victory and the Child on the Mother’s lap is revealed: 'Victory to Man, the new-born, the ever living!'

Marked by ‘crude symbolism, garish colours and general vividness.’ The Child, says M.K. Naik, ‘stands in sharp contrast with the subtler effects of the Gitanjali’.21 And though

Tagore exercised an enormous impact and influence on Indian English poets writing in the first half of the twentieth century, the inclusion of his works in the corpus of Indian English poetry has been questioned and found to be unjustifiable.\footnote{G.J.V. Prasad, opp. cit., p.30.}

Sarojini Naidu (1879 - 1947) was the daughter of the founder principal of Nizam College, Hyderabad. Like Toru Dutt before her, she also fell for the English Muse and wrote to her friend, Edmund Goose, 'while I live, it will always be the supreme desire of my soul to write poetry - one poem one line of enduring verse even. Perhaps I shall die without longing which is at once an exquisite joy and an unpleasurable anguish to me.' Her works include: \textit{The Golden Threshold} (1905), \textit{The Bird of Time - Songs of Life}, \textit{Death and the Spring} with an introduction by Edmund Goose (1912), \textit{The Broken Wing - Songs of Love, Death and Destiny} (1917), \textit{The Sceptred Flute - Songs of India} (1958) and \textit{The Feather of the Dawn} (1961).

When Sarojini Naidu's first collection \textit{The Golden Threshold} was published in 1905 the \textit{Review of Reviews} wrote, 'This little volume should silence for ever the scoffer who declares that women cannot write poetry'; 'Her poetry seems to sing itself as if her swift thoughts and strong emotions sprang into lyrics of themselves;' wrote \textit{The Times}; and the \textit{Glasgow
Herald made an important point: 'The pictures are of the East it is true; but there is something human in them that seems to prove that the best song knows nothing of the East or West.'

Her second volume of poems, The Bird of Time - Songs of Life, Death and the Spring came out in 1912. In the foreword to this volume Edmund Goose discerned 'a graver music' than in the earlier volume. These are 'songs of life and death' - life is often brightly pointed but death's shadow creeps or linger. The 'Bird' of the songs is, however, impartial and sings gay and sad songs alike. There are love songs, dirges and elegies all in this volume which was greeted by the reviewers as enthusiastically as the earlier volume. 'She has more than a profusion of beautiful things', wrote Edmund Thomas in the Daily Chronicle; 'She possesses her qualities in heaped measure', declared the Bookman; and the Yorkshire Post acknowledged that Sarojini Naidu 'has not only enriched our language but has enabled us to grow into intimate relation with the spirit, the emotions, the mysticism and the glamour of the East!' The poems comprise the dualities of life and death; joy and pain.

The Broken wing was published in 1917. While there are many remarkable poems in this collection "The Flute Player of Brindaban" is a jewel of a lyric, comparable only to "To a

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24 Ibid. p. 217.
Buddha Seated on a Lotus”. Indian poets and artists have found Buddha and Lord Krishna a perennial challenge to their imagination. In the caves of Ajanta, the Buddha is the ceaseless inspiration for the artist – a challenge as well as inspiration. Likewise the power of Lord Krishna’s matchless flute to draw all towards him is irresistible and gives no respite and no escape:

Why dost thou play thy matchless flute
‘Neath the kadamba tree,
And wound my idly dreaming heart
With poignant melody,
So where thou goest, I must go
My flute - player, with the.

The poem shows the desire of Radha for mystic union with the Divine. The melody of the flute is so enchanting that Radha wishes to go wherever Lord Krishna goes. She is so enchanted by the melody of the flute that she is willing to go to ‘Indra’s Golden - flowering groves’ or to ‘sad Yamas’s silent Courts.’ She is so devoted to Lord Krishana that no difficulty on earth can divert her from following the magical call of the flute. Radha’s yearning for Lord Krishna brought some mystic element in the poetry of Sarojini Naidu.

Other poems are “The Lotus”, and “Awake”. What is most characteristic of this volume is the intermittent subterranean rumbling, the pitiless evocation of broken images, the pointed
rendering of naked beauty and truth and ferocity in the last section, "The Temple: A Pilgrimage of Love", a triology of lyric sequences, each of eight poems. The words 'break', 'broke', and 'broken' recur again and again, and hammer their meaning into our hearts. This group of twenty-four lyrics, either a description of an imaginary situation or a record of a personal experience, is strewn with suggestions of a sudden distress that overwhelms the poet.

The Broken Wing was Sarojini Naidu's last collection of poems published during her lifetime. The other two - The Sceptred Flute and The Feather of the Dawn - were published posthumously. In her poems, Sarojini Naidu usually preferred the calm of the mind to the soul; she has sung of these too, the whirling eddies, the raging fevers - in several of her poems, notably in The Broken Wing. She was, above all, sensitive to beauty, the beauty of living things, the beauty of holiness, the beauty of Buddha's compassion, the beauty of the Lord of Brindavan. She did not especially seek out the bizarre, the exotic, the exceptional, but her poems lack neither variety nor the flavour of actuality. Children's poems, nature poems, patriotic poems, poems of love and death, poems of mythical transcendence, Sarojini Naidu wrote them all; and with her unfailing verbal felicity and rhythmical dexterity, she generally succeeded as well. 'Her poetry has a real beauty', said Sri Aurobindo in 1935 and thought that 'some of her lyrical work is likely - - - to survive among the
lasting things in English literature and by these, even if they are fine rather than great, she may take her rank among the immortals.\textsuperscript{25}

Harindranath Chattopadhyaya was Sarojini Naidu’s younger brother. When his first book of poems, \textit{The Feast of Youth}, appeared in 1918 Sri Aurobindo found in it:

\begin{quote}
- - - a rich and finely lavish command of language, a firm possession of metrical instrument, an almost blinding gleam and glister of the wealth of imagination and fancy, a stream of unfailingly poetic thought and image and a high though as yet uncertain pitch of poetic utterances of the Indian soul in the rhythms of the English language.\textsuperscript{26}
\end{quote}

In his autobiography \textit{Life and Myself} (1948) Harindranath reveals his interest in the process of poetic creation:

\begin{quote}
I dwelt more and more --- in the innermost recesses of the heart from where poetry comes. Words and phrases became an obsession; thoughts floated across the mind like clouds, some delicately tinted, others stormy, but past all their movement I began to grip more firmly the thought.\textsuperscript{27}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{25} Ibid. p. 223.
\textsuperscript{26} Ibid. p. 602.
\textsuperscript{27} Ibid. p. 603.
Veering spasmodically between the extremes of mysticism and materialism, Harendranath Chattopadhyaya has written on every experience and has exploited every possible mood, pose and stance. Verbal and metrical felicity is his main strength and also when the inspiration is dry or the content thin, his fatal weakness – as a poet.

The corpus of Indian English Poetry produced during the twentieth century may be conveniently divided into two halves – 1901 to 1950 and 1951 to date. Interestingly 1950 is not only the numerical half of the century, but also the year of the publication of Savitri, and the year of the death of its author, Sri Aurobindo. As regards the first half of the century, the prevailing critical opinion often seems to converge on the four or five well-known names, prominent both in literary as well as socio-historical, political and cultural fields, viz., Manmohan Ghose, his brother, Aurobindo Ghose, Rabindra Nath Tagore and Sarojini Naidu.

Let us now turn to Indian English Poetry written during the second half of the twentieth century. The second half of the twentieth century witnessed significant changes in Indian English Poetry. Around the time of national Independence it started to reform itself as a modern literature by incorporating techniques and themes of such major twentieth century modernists as T.S. Eliot and Ezra Pound, by discovering the great body of French experimental poetry.
from the nineteenth century Rimbaud and Lautreamont – to
the twentieth century dadaists and surrealists. Thus, Indian
English Poetry acquired a new currency and even
respectability and came to be considered 'new', much in the
manner it was 'new' in England, in France and, in America.

'New' poetry, of course, has been always 'modern' poetry,
even 'modernist'—no poet ever deliberately wrote 'ancient'
or 'antique' poetry and even when he seemed to write such
poetry, he inevitably charged it with a new note, a new
urgency of utterance. The 'new' poet was a witness to an
overall change at the social, political and economical level.
The post-war experiences were of particular significance to
the poets who found to their shock the decay of the old order.
The changing conditions necessitated the breaking of new
grounds. Poetry in the hands of the Romantics and later their
successors held no interest for the poets writing in the early
decades of the twentieth century. They felt an urge and a
necessity to evolve a new idiom for the fast changing
experiences of life. The essential note of 'modern' poetry is
certainly one of revolt. The modern poets rose in sharp
reaction against the highly ornate, artificial style of the
Romantics and seemed to plead for the use of the clear and
common speech. The poetry thus deals with commonplace,
ordinary happenings of day to day life. This is all evident in

Indian English Poetry written and produced in the second half of the twentieth century.

In India, the political and economic uncertainties led to some rethinking on the part of the writers and a literature of protest was the result. There were poets who were disillusioned with every thing and therefore, turned away from romance to satire, from idealism to cynicism. Even some of those who had begun as 'traditionalists' were soon infected by the new movement and started writing in a new style. Thus 'form' was given more importance compared with 'content' The imagery, syntax and rhythm now respond to man's feeling of restlessness and growing impatience with the socio-political environment. The poet has less time to indulge in poetical fancies. He concentrated on depicting the 'din and hubbub the confusion and indecision.'

Although poetry continues to be lyrical and by and large personal it is now written in precise, concrete, even harsh lexis. This new 'experimentation' in poetry writing by Indian poets does not however 'create a hiatus between the old and the new' because it maintained a continuity of the Indian tradition while giving 'definition to the needs of the present.'

The modernist movement in Indian English Poetry may be said to have started with Nissim Ezekiel who published his

30 Ibid. p. 643.
32 A.N. Dwivedi., opp. cit., p. 32.
first collection of poems in 1952. The 1950's and 60's saw a spurt in poetic activity with a number of poets writing in the modernist mode. There is quite a formidable list of modern Indian English poets.\(^{33}\) (As already noted, according to a report, there are three hundred and odd – Indian English poets belonging to this school) the main figures associated with this 'new' poetry are Nissim Ezekiel (1924-), P Lal (1929-) A.K. Ramanujan (1929 - 1995), R. Parthasarathy (1929-), Jayant Mahaptra (1928-), Shiv K. Kumar (1921-), Arun Kolatkar (1932-), Kamla Das (1934-), K.N. Daruwalla (1937-), Dom Moraes (1939-), Gieve Patel (1940-), Adil Jussawala (1990-), Pritish Nandy (1944-) and A.K. Mehrotra (1947-). Most of these poets started writing in the 50's or 60's. Their poetry is characterized by an unrelenting ironic stance, a distinct discomfort with tradition, and a negotiation with their Indianness and chosen language of expression. The search for a coherent self, the bitterness of human relationships, the skepticism over a suitable mode of negotiating between the self and other, and a sense of despair implicated within the debates of tradition versus modernity, the attempts to present / construct an India through versifying mark this first generation of Indian poets in English. In this brief historical study we propose to discuss the lives and works of these poets. Apart from this we also

\(^{33}\) P.K.J. Kurup, opp. cit., p. 9.
hope to make some observations on Indian English Poetry written in the 1980 and 1990. Let us first take these poets one by one.

Nissim Ezekiel and P. Lal are the two pioneering influences on modern Indian English Poetry. In fact it is P. Lal who published every emerging voice in Indian English Poetry from Ezekiel down to Vikram Seth. Not only that, he was also the first post-Independence anthologist bringing out (along with K. Raghvendra Rao) Modern Indo Anglian Poetry (New Delhi: Kavita, 1950) inaugurating it with the now famous Kavita Manifesto. The Manifesto while criticising Aurobindo and Sarojini Naidu, endeavoured to lay down some guiding principles for aspiring poets (Interestingly, R. Parthasarathy, in the Introduction to his Ten Twentieth Century Poets (New Delhi: Oxford University press, 1976) fails to acknowledge this important event. Lal reiterated his criteria as originality and experiment in word craft, intensity and strength of feeling, clarity of thought – structure and sense of actuality, in other words, freshness, sensibility, trained intelligence and vitality.

Lal's own verse collections include The Parrot's Death (1960), Love's the first (1963), Change! They said (1966), Draupadi and Jayadrath (1967). Apart from these, verse translations or 'transcreations' as he prefers to call them, of the Gita, the Isa Upanishad, the Dhammapada, and
selections from the Rig-Veda are his important contributions. "Yakshi" from Didarganj and Other Poems (1969), The Man of Dharma, The Rasa of Silence and Culcutta: A Long Poem (1974) portray themes from the Indian tradition. In The Man of Dharma and The Rasa of Silence, for instance, the poet borrows a known figure from the epic Mahabharata, namely Yudhistira and traces his progress 'through the spectrum' of the eight rasa till he arrives at the rasa of silence.

Nissim Ezekiel's A Time to Change (1952) as we noted earlier, is said to have launched the modernist movement in Indian English Poetry. One may like to quote the opening lines of the title poem "A Time of Change":

We leave the house, in April Lord,
How shall we return?
Debtors to the whore of Love,
Corrupted by the things imagined
Through the winter nights, alone
The flesh defiled by the dreams of flesh,
Rehearsed desire dead in spring
How shall we return?...
From what has been, but always
And any where, in London or in Rome, - - -

One hears at least three echoes of T.S. Eliot in this passage—A Song for Simon, The Wasteland, and Burnt Norton. We have already noted how the second half of the
century witnessed significant changes in Indian English Poetry and how around the time of national Independence it started to reform itself as a modern literature by incorporating techniques and themes of such major twentieth century modernists as Eliot and Pound. The opening lines of Ezekiel’s “A Time to Change” are a testimony to this and a testimony to his own criteria of poetry which he laid down in his Preface to Monika Varma’s poems:

Good Poetry is not always clear and lucid; nevertheless the amateur poet ought to aim at clarity and lucidity. Concrete and relevant images are usually superior to vague immensities. Simple, disciplined forms, within which much freedom can be exercised, help the poet to discover what he feels, more than sprawling accumulation of lines. Rhyme and other devices may be discarded only if structural compensations and very special effects are provided instead. Development within a poem is a sign of maturity in the poet.  

Ezekiel’s other volumes are Sixty Poems (1953), The Third (1959), The Unfinished Man (1960), The Exat Name (1965), Hymns in Darkness (1976) and Latter Day Psalms (1982). In his first two volumes, persons and places, memories and situations, literary echoes and moments of vision, all inspired

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Ezekiel to poetic utterance. He was painfully and poignantly aware of the flesh, its insistent urges, its stark ecstasies, its disturbing filiations with the mind. In his later poetry, however, there is revealed a more careful craftmanship, a more marked restraint, than in the first two volumes. There is a gain in quality and integrity, and the poet is able to achieve conventional directness and ease without loosing himself in discursiveness. Obscurity and mere angularity are avoided and beauty and bareness of statement often go together.

Though Ezekiel's background makes him a natural outsider, he has made himself a part of Indian landscape and culture and with unfailing faith states: 'India is simply my environment --- I have not withdrawn from India.' His poem "Night of the Scorpion" evokes superstitious practices we haven't still outgrown. It enacts an impressive ritual to which the mother's reaction, towards the end -- 'Thanks God the scorpion picked on me and spared my children'-- to her own suffering ironically cancels out earlier responses, both primitive and sophisticated and brings out its deep significance rooted in Indian ethos and its view of evil and suffering.

A. K. Ramanujan (1929-1995) apart from translating from Tamil, Kannada, Telgu and Sanskrit into English, wrote original poetry into English. So many translations he has to his credit that it has been perhaps rightly said that
Ramnujan's real forte is translation. Given his amazing gifts, there is an oriental strangeness and beauty about his lines and in the complexity and symmetry of his verse, the reader is often reminded of mathematical postulates. He overwhelms one with his stylistic devices—puns, internal rhymes, repetitions, ironies, compressions and elliptical progressions.


Ramanujan's *The Striders* (1966) won a Poetry Book Society recommendation and established his position as one of the most talented of the 'new' poets. This volume was an ample evidence of Ramanujan's determined poetic strategy characterized by imagist, linguistic and thematic concerns. The poet summons from the hinterland of memory buried moments of suspense, surprise or agony, and turns them into disturbingly vivid poems. *Relations* (1971) his next collection
is something of a bridge spanning childhood and age, and India and America. Second Sight (1986) is the latest collection. Although the poet's themes, concerns, attitudes and tones remain the same as in the earlier one, there is an increasing awareness on part of the poet with contemporary reality compared to the predominately private nature of the earlier poetry.

Through the publication of Oxford University Press's Ten Twentieth Century Indian Poets (1976) R. Parthasarathy (b. 1934) has played a pivotal role in the projection of Indian English Poetry. His collection Rough Passage (1977) was a runner up for the Commonwealth Poetry Prize (1977). After visiting as a Member to University of Iowa's International Writing Program for one year (1978-79) he finally settled down in America.

Rough Passage was written over a long period of time in which Parthasarathy dwells upon the question of language and identity and upon the inner conflict that arises from being brought up in two cultures. 'Exile' the first part, opposes the culture of Europe with that of India, and examines the consequences of British rule on an Indian especially the loss of identity with his own culture and therefore the need for roots. The second part, 'Trial', celebrates love as a reality here and now. 'Homecoming', the third and final part of Rough Passage, explores the phenomenon of returning to
one's home. It is a sort of overture made with the aim of starting a dialogue between the poet and his Tamil past. The strength of the poem derives from his sense of responsibility towards crucial personal events in his life.\textsuperscript{35}

Jayant Mahapatra (b.1928) began writing verse at the late age of thirty-eight without knowing much about this craft. His works include: \textit{Close the sky, Ten by Ten} (1971), \textit{Svayamvara and Other Poems} (1971), \textit{Countermeasures} (1973), poems translated from Oriya and \textit{A Rain of Rites} (1976). He was awarded the Jacob Glatstein Memorial prize of Poetry (Chicago) in 1975. During 1976-77 he was a member of the University of Iowa's international Writing Program.\textsuperscript{36}

The strange ride of Mahapatra is one of the unusual stories in the history of Indian English Poetry. A college teacher of Physics, Mahaptra began to write, as stated above, at a late age of thirty-eight but as if to make up for the late start, he has published ten books of verse in the space of fifteen years, some of which we have mentioned above. This poet, who had never been abroad until the age of forty-seven; has published regularly in some of the best journals in the West than any other Indian English Poet.\textsuperscript{37}

\textsuperscript{36} R. Parthasarathy. opp. cit., p.59.
Mahapatra's poetry is a phenomenon of special significance, for it seems to point toward the direction that Indian English Poetry will take most fruitfully. Extremely local, the Orissa landscape – Puri and Konark has a strong presence in the poetry of Mahapatra and the funeral pyres burn unceasingly on the banks of Mahapatra's poetic world.

Mahapatra's poetry is in the symbolist – surrealistic stream, and displays the working of an extremely sensitive, supple imagination. Apart from being highly local, Mahapatra is also very individual. Given the nature of his poetic impulse, it is not surprising that he has had some difficulty with political subjects. His long poem, "The Twenty fifth Anniversary of a Republic, 1975" sacrifices depth for plain denunciation, tending towards crudeness. But in the recent volume, The Dispossessed Nests, he deals more effectively with subjects like the Punjab turmoil and the Bhopal Gas Tragedy. Again, he stands out amongst Indian English poets in his readiness to tackle such subjects.38


38 Vilas Sarang, opp. cit., pp. 32-33
verse he has also written The Last Wedding Anniversary (1975), a play and The Bone's Prayer (1979), a novel.³⁹

Kumar's Trapfalls in the Sky (1986) won him the Sahitya Akademi award (1987). Here a large portion of verse reflects his apathetic and callous responses towards the lesser privileged of his country:

Lice creep through the sparse
crop of your singed hair
looking for terra ferma. ("A Tibetan Refuge Woman" p. 16)

You should have forged some communion
before unleashing the fierce
vendetta of your body-- - ("At Whorehouse", p. 18)

Elsewhere there is much of the libidinous, titillating stuff that has come to him via the west, which is rather banal and bankrupt of the poetic essence:

And now the wanton urge
To bite the apples
Off each other's breasts. ("Eve to Adam" ; p. 76)

If hips, thighs and calves sway
to some rhythm, it must be a sort of love-play- - -
("A Young Female Jogger" p. 56.)

Kumar's father, suspecting him of libidinous interests in

woman, sends him to a high priest who beckons him into a
dark chamber of the Shiva temple and begins sexually
cressing his neck. In “Broken Columns”; a sequence of
twelve poems, the poet’s sensuality is counterpointed against
the teachings of his parents, school and Indian wisdom.
While he chants from the Gita, ‘Feed not thy desire / on
objects of sense’, he is aware of a girl’s skirt and two tender
legs’.

Kumar seldom writes about his experiences bereft of his
sexuality, desires, broken marriage and the constructions of
life in India. Many of Kumar’s poems have no identifiable
natural location; they are concerned with his sexual desires
and fears of ageing. His best known poems, such as “Kali”
and “Indian Women” are about Indian life.

Arun Kolatkar’s (b. 1932) work which made him famous and
also got him the commonwealth poetry prize (1977) is Jejuri
(1976). "the boatride" Koltkar’s another poem, is an exercise
in poetic description, illumined by minute observation,
precise delineation and brilliant use of metaphor. He
deliberately sticks to description of phenomena, avoiding any
large meanings, except for such elusive ones such as thrown
up by flashes of metaphor. Not only the subject of the poem
(which brings “The yachts” to mind,) but also its general

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40 Bruce King, opp. cit., p. 121.
41 Ibid. opp. cit., p. 223.
manner is suggestive of William Carlos Williams.\textsuperscript{42} "the boatride" is characterized by a hypnotic stillness. Kolatkar's poetics is original, and it is in keeping with the incantatory quality of his experience. The absence of punctuation throughout reinforces this quality. The poem evokes surreal world in which imagination and reality are fused, in which contradictions in logic are acceptable to the imagination. Ordinary concepts of time and space do not operate, and everything is seen with an innocent eye.\textsuperscript{43}

\textbf{Jejuri}, the more ambitious work of Kolatkar is about his odyssey to the temple of Khandoba at Jejuri, a small pilgrimage town in western Maharashtra. The volume has a rare sense of unity and completeness. Kolatkar writes with the sense of naturalistic precision and detachment that he displays in "the boatride", and yet constantly verges on the surreal. His strength lies in this tantalizing interplay between the physical and the metaphysical. The book has been read by some as a debunking of Indian religion.\textsuperscript{44} C.D. Narsimhaih says, ‘What wonderful possibilities our poets have thrown away in our country by their failure to profit by the abundant wealth' lying within every body's reach as by their preference for using our temples and places such as Kolatkar has done in his prize winning poem Jejuri. Some examples:

\textsuperscript{42} Vilas Sarang, opp. cit., p. 30.
\textsuperscript{43} R. Parthasarathy, opp. cit., p. 40.
\textsuperscript{44} Vilas Sarang, opp. cit., p. 30.
What is god
and what is stone
the dividing line
if it exists
is very thin
at jejuri
and every other stone
is god or his cousin ("A scratch"; p. 28)
or
Who was that, you ask
The eight arm goddess, the priest replies
A sceptic match coughs.
You can not
But she has eighteen, you protest ("A Low Temple"; p. 17)
or
the irreverent manner in which the poet makes Chaityana speak:

Come off it
said Chaityana to a stone
wipe the red paint off your face
i don't think the colour suits you.

Kolatkar himself makes no choice between god and stone.
"The Priest's Son" is a parable of the poet : asked if he really believes the legends, the priests son 'doesn’t reply / but merely looks uncomfortable / shrugs and looks away' – and sees a butterfly ! So, too, at the end of the odyssey we return with 'a few questions knocking about in your head' and the
choice is clearly set between 'Jejuri on the one hand and the railway station on the other hand'. Like the priest's son, the poet looks away and sees a dance of cocks and hens in a field by the tracks.

This is a kind of answer, as valid in its way as any. But one cannot help feeling that the tensions between god and stone, priest and station-master, have not been explored with much rigour or anguish. Too often we are offered only surprises and play of intellect. Some readers, then, might feel at Journey's end that - to put it in the idiom Kolatkar loves - they have been taken for a ride ——.45

Kamla Das (b.1934) is a new phenomenon in Indian English Poetry—a far cry from Toru Dutt or even Sarojini Naidu. Her fiercely feminine sensitivity dares without inhibitions to articulate the hurts that it has received in an insensitive largely man made world.46 One of the most individualist of the 'new' poets, Das’s poetry appeared in magazines before Summer in Calcutta, a collection of 50 poems came out in 1965. Since then, it has been followed by The Descendants (1967), The Old Playhouse and Other Poems (1973), Collected poems (1984) and Only the Soul Knows How to Sing (1990). Her autobiography — My Story was published in 1976.

The predominant theme of *My Story* is the difficulty of being a woman in Indian society and finding love, instead of male lust and indifference in the institution of the arranged marriage. Naturally, while dealing with this problem, she becomes almost exclusively concerned with love, sex and loneliness to such an extent that many a time she seems to be preoccupied only with love and sex. *My Story* gives several descriptions of her own marriage as unsatisfying and unfulfilling and her poems present the image of a marriage which has grown lifeless, empty and dull.

Most of her poetry moves through the borderline between the fulfillment and unfulfillment of love. "The Dance of the Ennuchs" the opening poem in her first volume of poetry *Summer in Calcutta* sets the tone and temper of almost the entire collection:

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To be frank
I have failed
I feel my age
And my uselessness ("Composition")

am I hetero
am I lesbian
or am I just plain frigid? ("Composition")
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The only secrets I always withhold
are that I am so alone
and that I miss my grand mother ("Composition")

I am a freak. It's only
To save my face, I flaunt, at
Times, a grand flamboyant lust. ("The Freaks")

The emotional defeat, frustration and sense of the agony, the lack of fruitfulness, the lack of mingling of two bodies, the disappointment and deprivation ring all through her poetry, but what is overpowering about the poems is the sense of urgency. They literally boil over, for instance "The Old Playhouse", "The Looking-glass" and "The Freaks". In "Substitute" she tells us rather cynically about what her experience of love turned out to be:

We kissed and we loved, all in a flurry
For another short hour or two
We went all warm and wild and lovely.
After that love became a swivel door,
When one went out, another came in. ("Substitute")

The failure to find love leaves the poet in the claustrophobic world of the self. A way out is found in a Whitmanesque, oceanic feeling of identification with the world: He is every
man who wants a woman, just as I am every / Woman who seeks love ("An introduction").

Kamla Das is credited to have brought in Indian English Poetry 'confessional poetry' of the like of Sylvia Plath and Anne Sexton. To write 'sexually uninhibited' poetry in the nineteen sixties and seventies in India needed enormous courage from a woman, it was unusual in the Indian context and was new in Indian English Poetry and Kamla Das's bold and ruthless self revelation 'created a climate for revelatory, confessional poetry by Indian women.'

Dom Moraes (b. 1939), like Nissim Ezekiel, published his first collection in the fifties, and like the older poet, wrote metrical verse. One of the most successful of the new poets be has published A Beginning (1957); John Nobody (1965); Poems (1955-65), Collected Poems (1957-87), Serendip (1990). His first book, A Beginning, had a good press review and the award of the. Hawthornden prize settled more or less the direction of his future.

Moraes works in the British tradition. The choice of his subjects and his general poetic stance suggests a wish to identify with the British poetic world and has affinities with English Romantic poetry and with the surrealism of (Dylan Thomas and George Barker). There is even a certain kinship

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48 Vilas Sarang, opp. cit., p. 27.
50 Vilas Sarang, opp. cit., p. 80.
with the 'decadence' of the nineties (drink, smoke, unhappiness, ennui, heavy, languorous rhythms). The world is observed 'Through a blurred haze of whisky, smoke and love (John Nobody). The poetry is unabashedly egocentric. It has an Autistic quality, suggesting deep absorption in a private world. Fantasies are build up in pomes like 'Vivisection' and 'The General' (John Nobody). Inclusive of terror and loss, the fantasy world pays heed to the reality principle.

As befits its Romantic pedigree, Moraes's poetry is specially attuned to childhood. The rosy tints are not absent (there are 'golden children') ; but it is the sadness and the horror that are underlined in poems like "Family Dinner" and "The Children".

Haunted by a sense of displacement, Moraes's vision borders on the nihilistic. John Nobody, 'an ambitious, autobiographical poem, ends with the picture of the dark drink sodden poet', 'Lifting uncertain arms as if to bless' and with the memorable lines 'Even so great a gesture of the hands / Can hardly hold so vast an emptiness.' In spite of its rich imagery, the whirlpool of the self leads ultimately to the void.

Morase's more recent poems deepen his earlier themes and moods. The vision of the void is extended further, and becomes cosmic in "Absences”. 'No sound would be heard if / so much silence was heard'; the poem ends with the vision of
the world as 'only held together / By its variety of absences'. Serendip (1990) his recent volume of poems comprising three sections delve into the mythical aspects of Sri Lanka, Greece and Sweden.

Moraes is a poet who generally does not fit into the general pattern of Indian English Poetry. Nor can he be dismissed as a second-class citizen of the British literary world; his voice is too authentic, too individual, for that. His is a unique position, and a unique contribution to Indian English Poetry.51

K.N. Daruwalla (b. 1937) along with Jayant Mahapatra has shown stamina and consistent productivity. Daruwalla's first two volumes appeared in successive years: Under Orion (1970) and Apparition in April (1971).

Daruwalla stands out amongst Indian English Poets for bringing subjects outside the ambit of poets. His profession—he was in the Indian Police Service—has clearly helped him in this. His poems, "Curfew—In a Riot—Torn City", "Poems from the Tarai" (Under Orion), "Routine" (Apparition in April) "Curfew 2" and "walking to the center" (Winter Poems) are a result of the experience of his active professional life. He brings alive the world of riot and curfew, sirens, warrants, men nabbed at night, lathi blows on cowering bodies, 'the scratch on your khaki back', soda bottles and acid bulbs.

51 Ibid. p. 18-19.
waiting on the rooftops, press communiqués. The contemporary Indian social –political world not merely of the city, but also of small town, village and the country side is portrayed with heavy strokes, laden with savage irony.

No end to hoarding!

Breaking open the lockers they find

a brief case full of rice. (*notes*)

There is a large body of Daruwalla’s verse which falls within the domain of satire. Political profiles drawn in “Food and Words”, “Words and Food”, (Apparition in April), “Collage” (Under Orion), and “Yes, Friends” (Winter Poems) are marked by pungent observation and acidic comment. Many of his poems such as “Pilgrimage to Badrinath”; “Carvak”, “Shiva: At Timarsain”, “Shiva: At Lodheswar”; “The Dip”, “Beads”, “The Round of Seasons” are on Hindu themes but the impression one gets after reading these poems is not of sensitive empathising or of deep understanding of the ancient Indian tradition.

Daruwalla is at his best when he works with selective image and metaphor, as in “The Beggar” (Under Orion) and “Vignette” (Crossing of Rivers). “Kohoutek” (The Keeper of the Dead) presents a constellation of powerful metaphors. “Fire Hymn” (Apparition in April) works through incident, but here two incidents are juxtaposed effectively, and described with economy, achieving an intense, dramatic effect.
The slackness of tone is betrayed by Daruwalla's frequent use of the exclamation mark, which gives his poems a chatty air. In more recent poems in *The Keeper of the Dead*, he has tried to use rhyme, without much success. 'waver / mirror', 'sin / Jinns', 'shines / times', 'dust / lusts' ("The Son speaks to the Dead Rake").

Adil Jussawala (b. 1940) was educated at Oxford, and lived in England for thirteen years. His nostalgia for England from where he had reluctantly returned, is manifested in the title of his first collection, *Lord's End* (1963) – a place in Cornwall in the south of England, jutting into the English channel. "Seventeen", the first poem in "Land's End" tries to borrow from Dylan Thomas and Walter de la Mare by exploring the world of childhood:

Time was short
Short time
When a boy
Lived each moment
Anew.
Now detached, the
Water is spilled
Killed
On rocks
One by one
The lights are snuffed

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52 Ibid. p. 22.
The fragmented syntax and absence of any striking image lands only jerkiness. It is an instance of prose chopped up. The collection does not deign to deal with Indian themes, most of the poems being set against English or European background: “Self Portrait by Van Gogh”, “Landlady”, “Mendelssohn”, “Les Clochards”, “A La Reine Blanche”, “Geneva”, to mention just a few titles. The tenor of the entire volume suggests a desire to follow in Dom Moraes’s footsteps. The voice is not quite mature or individual; but Land’s End is not without connections with the later poetry. Poems like “Tea in the Universities” and “Two Cuttings” already show Jussawal’s peculiar sense of humour and mode of irony. “In Memory of the Old School” evokes memories of an elite school in Bombay, but the mention of ‘ragged sweater urchin’ who ‘Gained mutely / At our singing’ points towards Jussawalla’s later concerns. Fourteen years later, Jussawalla’s second volume of verse Missing Person (1976) comes as a mature work in which, abandoning his ambition to become an ‘English poet’, Jussawala emerges as an Indian poet revealing himself as a poet with the strongest awareness of contemporary social and political realities among Indian English poets. His is a world of floods, famines, wars, riots, student posters, five year plans, colonial apes, police dogs, running dogs, cell-mates, stone-throwers, refugees, immigrants, high-bottomed foreign-returneds and a steel genitaled Jaguar with Miss India at the wheel. Jussawalla brings this newspaper vocabulary to life,
chiefly through his almost visceral rage, bitterness and irony. His particular achievement in *Missing Person* is a blend of public and private worlds. Significantly, however, the poem is not just a rendering of socio-political and personal detail; it is an essay in myth-making. References to the 'saviour', 'the broken tribe', 'bright angels', 'Satan', 'Caliban', etc., ironic though they may be, indicate the poet's attempt to transform the 'missing person' into an archetype.

Jussawala has a distinctive style. Among Indian English poets, he alone has deliberately avoided fluidity and ease, and has fashioned for himself a jagged, elliptical style that answers his poetic needs.53

Gieve Patel's (b. 1940) works include *Poems* (1966), *How Do You Withstand Body* (1976) and *Mirrored, Mirroring* (1991). Patel believes that 'if a poem is clear, well-thought out, purposive, logical and true, it will have changed something---first, in the poet himself --- because if this does not happen there is no poem'. His poems, rightly, therefore, try to make articulate often sardonically, the pains of growing up.54

Patel's first volume, *Poems* (1966), shows a bruised sensitivity. The poet is alive to the suffering around him, and to his own situation. "Nayal Purnima" brings out his predicament as a Parsi:

53 Ibid. p. 70.
Our interiors could remain
Quite English. The local gods hidden in
Cupboards from rational parsi eyes
Would suddenly turn up on the walls
Garlanded alongside the king and the Queen.
And the rulers who had such praise for our manners
Disappeared one day. So look instead for something else
Even accept and belong.

The Parsi is seen as caught between two worlds; the pattern
of predicament recurs later.\textsuperscript{55} "On Killing a Tree" implies that
all forms of life are essentially similar to their desire to love,
expand, reproduce, and their similarity in suffering, pain and
ageing. Uprooting the diseased tree is similar to performing a
surgical operation in requiring a lack of compassion:

So hack and chop
But this alone won't do it.
But not so much pain will do it.
The bleeding back will heal
And from close to the ground
Will rise curled green twigs
Miniature boughs
Which if unchecked will expand again
To former size.

\textsuperscript{55} Vilas Sarang, opp. cit., pp. 22-23.
Such images us 'simple job of the knife', 'its leprous hide' sensitive, 'hidden', 'choking' sustain the surgical analogy.

Obviously, Patel's perception is influenced by his medical career. The thirty poems in his first book include such titles as "Post - Mortem", "The Difference in the Morgue", ("Old Man's Death"), and "Catholic Mother" ("Your child at Hospital"); Many of these poems, including "For Kennedy" reveal the physician's awareness that inside / the always red muscle and blood ; people are the same, 'one' and that the doctor's compassion is useless in the fact of the body's destruction through illness, accident or assassination.  

The poems in How Do You Withstand Body (1976) - the second volume, are often even more compressed, oblique, elliptical and illusioned than those of the earlier volume. Patel aims to be aiming at a thickly textured, economical, rough, vigorous, colloquial style which expresses a mind obsessed by physical pain and by various kinds and ways of destruction. His mode is ironic, often grimly and savagely so, women's sex is a 'target spot / showered / with kisses, knives', ("What Is It Between"). In one poem he develops the 'modest proposal' to mutilate a human body limb by limb, and then shocks the reader with 'You are now full circle / with

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56 Bruce King, opp. cit., p. 119.
nothing / Not thought of, not done before' ("Forensic Medicine").


Mehrotra's poetry largely falls into three groups. His earliest work is an immediate reaction to his discovery of the modern, post modernist and earlier avant - grade styles and poetics. The second period is marked by surrealistic mode and the third when the poet is especially fascinated by childhood places associated with his family. Mehrotra's world, in fact, is a world of childhood fantasy and play: 'The old woman's alone in her shoe / Georgee Porgies's is a pimbly beau' ("The Exquisite Corpse") ; 'The fabulous Red Riding Hoods / in gladed wood' ("House by the Mill").

Mehrotra cites Andre Breton's Manifesto of Surrealism (1924) as one of the abiding influences in his work. He himself

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57 Vilas Sarang, opp. cit., p. 23.
58 Bruce King, opp. cit., p. 184.
confesses that his poems comprise 'games, ' riddles and accidents.' However, poems like "Company Period" show Mehrotra moving towards a new, 'realistic' manner and "The Roys", almost like prose, is continually enlivened by imaginative nuances of phrasing. Here abandoning his surrealistic mood, Mehrotra returns to realism with a vengeance.\textsuperscript{59}

Pritish Nandy's (b.1947) \textit{Early Poems, Of Gods and Olives} (1967), \textit{On Either Side of Arrogance} (1968) and his experiment in verse drama \textit{Rites for a Plebian Statue} (1969) give evidence of an enterprising and erratic talent. Most of his poems are an experimentation in Pyrotechnics, interesting to look at but baffling to the understanding. For example, here is a piece from his poem, "In Transit, Mind Seeks":

\begin{quote}
Use Mathematics

to solve problems of position / location

and point in space

the calculation of

illogic love

on

either side

of

arrogance

i draw the line.\textsuperscript{60}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{59} Vilas Sarang, opp. cit., pp. 29-30.
\textsuperscript{60} K.R. Srinivas Iyengar, opp. cit., p. 670.
The corpus of Indian English Poetry as stated before has quite a formidable list of poets writing in the second half of the century. So far we have discussed the major poets who may be said to be associated with the modernist movement in Indian English Poetry. All these poets who began writing in the 50's and 60's or even early 70's as in the case of Shiv K. Kumar whose work *Articulate Silences* was published in 1970, are said to belong to the first generation of Indian poets writing in the second half of the twentieth century and their poetry is marked by the search for a coherent self, the bitterness of human relationships, the scepticism over a suitable mode of negotiating between the self and the other, and a sense of tradition versus modernity, the attempts to present / construct an India through versifying. Of course, the later poetry of this generation shows an abandonment of the experimental mode. Gone, also, is the expression of alienation from, and dissonance with tradition as is evident from the later volumes of Ezekiel and Ramanujan which indicate a certain spiritual turn.\(^6^1\)

Then, we have a large number of poets—Dilip Chitre (1938-), Eunice de Souza (1940-), Saleem Peeradina (1944-), Santan Rodrigues (1948-), Aga Shahid Ali (1949-), Meena Alexander (1952-), Vikram Seth (1952-), Manohar Shetty (1953-), Melanie Silgardo (1956-) and Imtiaz Dharker — to name just a few who published their first work around the 1970's and

1980's and are said to belong to the second generation of Indian English poets writing in the second half of the twentieth century. Santan Rodrigue's *I Exist* was published in 1976, de Souza's *Fix* in 1979, Peeradina's *First Offence* in 1980, Dilip Chitre's *Travelling in a Cage* in 1980, Manohar Shetty's *A Guarded Space* in 1981, Vikram Seth's *Mappings* in 1982 and Aga Sahid Ali's *The Half-Inch Himalayas* and *A Walk Through the Yellow Pages* in 1987. The women poets questioned the patriarchal system and began to articulate both a resistance and self-confidence. The resistance to religious and social codes that enervate the woman's spirit, that circumscribe and refuse her an identity outside that of mother / wife / lover, derived much inspiration from Kamla Das. Thus Dharker's 'purdah' becomes symptomatic of a social condition and the resultant resistance.\(^\text{62}\) Focussed upon individual characters, or upon places the poems of de Souza have a sharpness, and a sureness of touch. In the autobiographical poems the tone is less sure, less controlled, often seeming to be on the verge of hysteria or breakdown, indicative of less than successful attempts to master the inner turmoil. The poems on parents tersely express complex conflicting feelings, and lend easily to Freudian interpretation:

\[\text{It was kill or die} \]

\[\text{And you got me away}\]

\(^{62}\) Ibid., p. 13.
The blood congeals at lover's touch
The guts dissolve in shit
-
In dream
I hack you.  ("Forgive me, Mother")

In yet another
I hold the child up in delight
The revolving fan cuts her through
It's a dream
I'm you
-

The black dawn. The grinning skull
I'm you.  ("For my Father, Died young")

Sylvia Plath and Anne Sexton — like, the 'confessional' narratives is often ruptured with images of violence in a text that is truly feminist. Silgardo's strongest poems, along with those on her father's death, reveal a psychology of horrifying fear, depression, self-hate, insecurities, self-humiliation and failed-emotions. "1956 – 1976" the fist poem in the selection The Earthworm's Story, begins.63

Twenty years ago
they laid a snare
I emerged headlong

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63 Bruce King, opp. cit., p. 160.
embarrassed, wet.
They slapped me on my bottom
I screamed,
That was my first experience. ("1956–1976")

Exile and displacement, nostalgia for cultural roots, and the schizophrenic imaginary haunt inspire the poetry of Aga Shahid Ali, perhaps best symbolised in his "Postcard from Kashmir" in The Half-Inch Himalayas. Vikram Seth’s Mappings (1982) records his dual feelings of nostalgia for India after studying abroad for many years and his continuing attraction to the ‘notes of other birds, / The Nightingale, the wren.’ Many of the poems in this first volume are of youthful restlessness or concern, rebellion and ambivalent feelings towards family, especially his father, with whom he appears to have strong disagreements.’ I had few memories of your love / Or kindness, even speech’. The Humble Administrator’s Garden (1985) with its three sections is represented by a tree whose name is symbolic of a different country in which Seth has lived wutong (China), neem (India), and live-oak (America). The California poems are of interest for their mixture of amused enjoyment, witty defensiveness, sense of danger, comic incongruities and feelings of loneliness among easy acquaintances, adventures and comforts.

While The Golden Gate (1980) - a novel in verse is similar to the playful cartoon quality of some recent American popular songs and films it is also part of a literary tradition which
includes Byron's comic satires and the self-conscious artifice of Ariosto's great narrative poem *Orlando Furioso*.

Seth's celebration of San Francisco travel, cosmopolitan pleasures, and American comforts has a dual function.\(^{64}\) It wards off the loneliness, the continuing consciousness of having left home, and it creates an exciting, sophisticated, world to replace what has been lost. Seth's poems, including *All You Who Sleep Tonight* (1990) offer a strong sense of being uprooted, lonely and of needing to enjoy the moment because there are no lasting deeper relationships available, and life is an adventure abroad. He remains, however, different from the main stream, Indian English poets in his themes, concerns, attitudes and use of British English.

The third generation of Indian English poets writing in the second half of the twentieth century began publishing around the late 1980s and 1990s. Some formal experimentation and an increased self-reflexivity which was discerned in the poetry of the 1970s and 1980s became the hallmark of the poetry of the 1990s. While there is no well defined quarrel with predecessors the new poets do exhibit certain influences—the formal, ironic mode initiated by Ezekiel, Shiv K. Kumar, the contemplative sentimental but historical minded Mahaptra, the experimentalism of Kolatkar and Pritish Nandy, the psychological exploration of sexuality, gender

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\(^{64}\) Ibid., p. 230.
roles and identity of Kamla Das, the esotericism of Mehrotra, the search for / retrieval of cultural memories in Ramanujan and Parthasarathy, the violence and wit-laden imagery of Daruwalla find resonance in numerous younger poets today. Thus we have Kamla Das's candour, daring thematisation of taboo subjects, a celebration and exploration of the women's identity in poets like Tara Patel, Sambrani, Charmayne D'Souza, Imtiaz Dharkar, Sujata Bhatt, not to mention Eunice d'Souza and Melanie Silgardo to whom we have already referred to while briefly discussing the poetry of the poets of the second generation. Roots, cultural displacement, nostalgia figure in the poetry of Aga Shahid Ali and Sujata Bhatt. Formal experimentation and linguistic innovations characterize Vikram Seth, Bibhu Padhi, Melanie Silgardo, Dilp Chitre. There is also an ambivalence of attitude towards the past/tradition, and a conscious and cautious historicisation of poetry in certain cases and a highly- self-reflexive, interrogative stance of the poet, identified as a 'postmodern' trend in Indian English Poetry. Along with this self reflexive style, the poetry of the '90s exhibits the following themes and techniques: city-struck, experimental, explicit and frank, frequently violent, earthy, strongly individualistic --- gender conscious. Situated at the interface of desire, despair and delirium, Indian Poetry in English today explores the self. In rare cases the poetry touches and scorches.  

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We have surveyed the history of Indian English Poetry from its earliest period, that is, from its beginning in Derozio to its modern, post modern / contemporary period. In this brief account of the history of Indian English Poetry we have focussed largely on the major poets of Indian English Poetry with a view to get some idea into the nature of their works. Now, we propose to discuss the major themes in Indian English Poetry. Since themes cannot be studied in complete isolation from language we intend to study both and take up these in the next chapter in terms of the content and form of Indian English Poetry.