Chapter IV

Indian English Poetry
Content

Indian English Poetry as we have seen in our recounting of history, began in 1827 with the publication of Henry Vivian Derozio's book of poems entitled Poems. This approximately one hundred and seventy five years body of poetry which started with Derozio, the fiery Eurasian who was revolutionary not only in his iconoclastic ideas but also in his effort to initiate a new form of literary composition, that is, Indian English Poetry, has offered over the period a chequered history of growth and development that continually made, unmade and remade itself through constant experiments in matter of themes and styles. Indian English Poetry has undergone several phases of experimentations resulting in varied phenomena of ceaseless poetic activities that vouch for the inner strength of the succeeding poets. The social reforms, the individual ecstasies, the agonies of living personae as well as love, sex, nature, rejuvenation of legends, metaphysical queries, longing, devotion, mystical contemplation, spiritual illumination and urbanity are some of the themes that have been treated and projected by Indian English poets during both the pre-Independence and post-Independence periods. A host of stylistic experimentation and linguistic innovations have marked the growth of Indian
English Poetry from its inception to the post-Independence and post-modern periods.¹

Thus we have among others, Toru Dutt, Sarojini Naidu, Aurobindo Ghose writing on legends, love, longing, devotion and mystical contemplation, metaphysical queries and spiritual illumination.

Toru Dutt, it is generally accepted, is the first major voice in Indian English Poetry and her poem "Our Casuarina Tree" found in many anthologies is often signaled out as the first major Indian English poem.² "Our Casuarina Tree" is basically a descriptive poem in which an actual tree is described in terms of beautiful images drawn around it. It is modelled on Keats's "Ode to Autumn". The only difference is that the eleven line stanza has different rhyme pattern abb cddc eee. The recurring echo established by the rhyme scheme sets the line apart as a complete rhythmical unit comparable to musical phrase. It further supplies the organisational pattern of the stanzas.

The poem "Our Casuarina Tree" is an assertion of Indian nationalism. Toru Dutt was fond of writing on Indian themes even while she lived in England. The tree that is described in the poem is associated with Toru's childhood in India. She remembers the Indian tree even when she is in Italy or

² G.J.V. Prasad, opp. cit., p. 27.
France. All the five stanzas of the poem are written with fine rhythm and cadence. The stanza of the poem is based on the logic of an image growing out of an image. Thus the first stanza opens with a simile of a 'huge python' linked to a 'creeper'. The comparison between these two apparently dissimilar objects is based on the shared attribute expressed in the phrase 'winding round and round'. The poet then builds into this simile a number of other figures of sense to convey the sense of 'hugeness' of the tree. Hence the creeper winds round the rugged trunk indented with deep scars. The poetical fancy in 'upto its summit near the stars' gives an idea of the tree's height. The vicarious reference in whose embraces bound / No other tree could live' reveals the tree's vitality. Fresh images are evoked by the appearance of the word 'embrace'. This word involves the attribution of the behaviour of a person in love, to the winding of the creeper round the tree. Here we begin to have a poetical sense to the 'grace' of the tree and begin to see the tree in all its charm. The images that come up in the next six lines of the stanza further develop the idea. Thus a metaphor compares the tree to a 'gallant giant' and the creeper to a 'scarf' thereby stressing the ornamental value of the creeper round the tree. The 'crimson flowers' of the creeper, as well as the 'bird and bee' images further heighten the effect produced by the figures. From day scenes we move to the night scenes. By the use of the figure exaggeration the poet transcends the limit of the ordinary world and reaches out the world of
magic. Hence the image of a song floating in the garden, night after night (‘that seems to have no close’, as if sung from the tree in the dark (‘sung darkling’) creates an ethereal beauty around the tree. This exercise of the poet in building image upon image carries a unique charm that can be felt by a sensitive reader. For instance, knowing fully that the creeper does not climb the summit near the stars, nor the tree can sing, the poet employs such poetic expressions which conjures up the image and enables us to accept them without challenge. Ultimately we become convinced with the beauty and grandeur of the tree, which otherwise will have remained uncomprehended without the expressions employed by the poet.

In the second stanza the poet employs the figure the condensed expression. The quintessence of condensed expression is nothing but a suggested or implied comparison between the main subject described and the incidental ones mentioned along side it. Hence, we encounter in this stanza beautifully balanced images which evoke a naturally agreeable landscape replete with accurate botanical details. The central figure, i.e., the tree is invoked and then the poet proceeds to weave images of the winter season around it. Hence she sees a ‘gray baboon’ sitting ‘statue like on its bough’ ‘watching the sunrise’ while on its lower branch its ‘puny’ off-springs ‘leap about and play’. What is to be noticed here is the use of simile in ‘statue’ like. By likening the posture of the baboon
to a statue, the poet highlights the 'winter' season when things are generally still and quiet. Again the grim 'statue' image works against the active 'leap about and play', image, to create a paradox or contrast. The same effect is again achieved through the image of the hailing kokilas and the 'sleepy cows'. The simile of white lilies looking like 'snow enmassed' 'in the shadow' cast on the 'tank' by the 'hoar tree' is replete with condensed expression. Also to be noticed here is the colour effect achieved. The outstanding colour is 'gray' which co-exists with the image of the winter season when things appear gray with frost. The word 'hoar' which means 'white or gray with age or frost', as also the beautiful winter lilies looking like 'snow enmassed' highlight this colour.

The transition from the second stanza to the third stanza is achieved through the word 'magnificence'. We also notice the change of scene, from the external world to the internal world. Images rush out of mood. Hence the image of 'sweet companions' are evoked from the poet. The metaphor in 'loved with loveliness' emphasises the intensity of the relationship. The poet’s fancy is at work once again. Hence the tree in sympathy with the poet, whose eyes are blinded by 'hot tears' in memory of the lost companions, sounds a 'dirge-like murmur'. From this simile a series of comparisons are drawn up. Hence the 'dirge like murmur' becomes the sound of 'sea breaking on a shingle beach' and then a
‘lament’ and finally ‘an eerie’ speech. The peculiar effect of these comparisons lies in the apparently unrelated way with which images are brought together. The sudden appearance of the word ‘haply’ in the concluding line of the stanza works against the ‘lament’ of the previous line to create paradox or contrast.

The apparent contrast of the last line of the third stanza is carried over to the fourth stanza by holding ‘unknown’ against ‘well – known’ : the contrast is again retained in the images that follow. Hence the ‘breaking’ sea of the previous stanza now lay in ‘sheltered bay’. Its waves did not ‘break’ but ‘rose’ in ‘wraith’ and ‘gently kissed’ ‘the classic shore’ and not ‘shingle - beach’. We have one of the finest examples of the figure of exaggeration in the lines ‘beneath the moon / when the earth lay tranced in a dreamless soon.’ A heightened trance-like feeling similar to a time when the poet was so intensely absorbed in her emotions, that she was as if sealed off from the ordinary world, is being recalled in these lines. It is in such ‘tranced’ moments that one begins to have transcendental views. Here the tree acquires ‘soul’ dimensions and is merged with that of the poet ‘Mine inner vision rose a form sublime’, / ‘Thy form, O Tree---’. In the presence of the sublime vision the poet’s language is not fragmented and the images do not run after the other. The poet’s use of the stately clause is to be noticed here. The small ‘t’ in ‘tree’ becomes capital ‘T’ and is then addressed
as 'Thy' and 'Thee'. Metaphorically the tree becomes man through the bond of shared origin and fate. The stanza is remarkable in the sense every word used here is indicative of the adoration with which the tree is viewed.

This adoration is continued in the last stanza where in a moment of extreme admiration the poet carves a prayer for the tree

"Therefore I fain would consecrate a lay
Unto thy honour, Tree ---".

Once the plane of mystical level is achieved, abstractions follow abstractions as no concrete form exists for the tree. The stanza hence resolves metaphorically into the language of address (Thou, They) into the language of supplication ('May love defend thee') and the language of collocation ('Pale Fear, trembling Hope, Death, the skeleton', 'Time the Shadow ---').

"Our Casuarina Tree" is one of the miscellaneous poems from the collection Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan. As the most representative poem of Toru Dutt it shows that, Toru Dutt as a poet, has a remarkable maturity that deceives her tender age. Her poems are wrought with fine artistry in resonance with the poetic conception. The different layers of her poems work in remarkable harmony with the poet's vision. The sound becomes a definite part of the sense through a
sustained use of imagery. Her poems thus give the impression of perfection.

Toru Dutt's volume *Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan* provides the best description of India through competent narrative and descriptive verse. The stories are borrowed from the *Ramayana*, the *Mahabharata*, the *Vishnu Purana* and the *Bhagvat Purana*. It reveals the soul of India to the west through the medium of English Poetry. All the nine stories contained in the volume are moving stories. "Savitri" shows the dedication and constancy in love that a typical Indian woman has for her husband. "Lakshman" depicts of the great sense of duty that he had for his elder brother Rama. "Jogdhaya Uma" portrays that the Goddess cared more for a simpler pedlar than a pompous priest. The Royal Ascetic and the Hind challenges the asceticism by showing Bharat's ardent love for a simple faith. "Dhurva" delineates that when the prince failed to gain the favour of his royal father, he made up by attaining spiritual greatness. "Buttoo" demonstrates the value of self-help and determination that a low-caste boy learned the art of archery without any help from Dronacharya. "Sindhu" depicts the portrayal of an ideal son who is devoted to the services of his weak and blind parents. "Prahlad" is the story of a devotee who served the God by opposing his cruel father. "Sita" tells us about her suffering during her last days. All these stories are some of the gems of Indian literature and with all these
themes, *Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan* is brilliantly steeped in ancient Indian thought and folklore.

The rejuvenation of legends and the delineation of mythical characters is one of the many themes in Indian English Poetry and poets past as well as present have always remained fascinated by the character from the two great epics the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*. The *Ramayana* of Valimiki and the *Mahabharata* of Vyasa, which have been, as it were, the two eyes of the nation; with their character, they have molded the ideals of the whole nation and in their sway over the peoples and the religious movement they gave birth to, they outgrew their pure literary character. The *Ramayana* in 24,000 couplets and the *Mahabharata* in a million couplets, are both composed in the heroic measures *sloka* - *anushtubh* and *upjati*. The former shows greater unity of authorship while the latter incorporated into the framework of its main story many ancient lays and edifying dialogues and discourses on ethics and philosophy. Valimiki, like the *Vedic* poets delighted in similes, and among human emotions, he depicted not only the great love of Rama and Sita and the poignant suffering undergone by the latter, but also portrayed as leading motifs such emotions as friendship, brotherly love, and above all, the love of the father for his son. In his hero, Rama, Valmiki presented an embodiment of truth and righteousness, who could, for the sake of these principles, sacrifice even his dearest. The *Ramayana* has been called
the first of poems, adi-kavya, and truly did Valmiki lay down the path for the later classical poets, in formal features, in the development of the theme, in the portrayal of character and the delineation of emotion. Vyasa depicted in his hero Yudhishthira the same ideal of righteousness; his Mahabharata is the story of the feud and the fratricidal war of the cousins Kauravas and Pandavas, through which Vyasa sought to emphasise the vanity of earthly possessions and the futility of wars on their behalf. Some of the old stories imbedded in this great epic, e.g., of Nala and Damayanti, are superb for their simplicity, grace and pathos; of the many great dialogues and discourses here, that between Lord Krishana and Arjuna on the eve of the battle, the Bhagvat Gita, has today been translated into every language of the world and inspired scores of writers and thinkers.

Toru Dutt was not the only poet to be inspired by the stories from the Ramayana and the Mahabharata. As will be seen in this study of the major themes of Indian English Poetry, many poets were influenced by the mythical characters delineated in these epics.

The theme of mythical characters, rejuvenation of legends, love and nature, metaphysical queries, spiritual yearnings and illumination and mystical contemplation finds fullest expression in the poetry of Sri Aurobindo who occupies a distinguished place in Indian English Poetry and remains
unrivalled on account of his poetic achievement. Apart from his interpretation of the Vedas, the Upanishads and the Gita, the whole of his intuitive grasping of the knowledge of God and the fervour of his desire for union with the universal spirit is to be seen in his Life Divine, which offers to the world the original thinking of a practising philosopher. Perhaps such a genius and an original thinker naturally turns towards poetry which is the inevitable medium which gives vent to the inner complexities of mind. So a mystic such as Aurobindo needs poetry inevitably. He is a born poet and genius, for invariably they both go together. As Aurobindo puts it himself in one of his letters: 'A born poet is usually a genius, poetry with any power or beauty in it implies genius'. As a poet Aurobindo developed his own theory of poetry and considered all 'future poetry' to be more and approximate to the Vedic mantra, minimizing, if not wholly eliminating, the meddling middlemen - the intellect, the senses, even the imagination - and effecting in one swift unfailing step the miracle of communication from the poet to reader. As Aurobindo has remarked in The Future Poetry:

--- the true creator (of poetry), the true hearer is the soul- A divine ananda --- is that which the soul of the poet feels and which, when he can conquer the human difficulties of his task, he succeeds in

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pouring also into all those who are prepared to receive it.⁴

A study of his poetry shows how he always tried to strive for this poetry of divine ananda and tried especially in the poems of his last period to conquer 'the human difficulties of the task' and create a body of mantric poetry that came as a proper culmination of his long, sustained and inspiring career as a poet.

Sri Aurobindo's first book of verse Songs to Myrtilla (1895) was written mostly between eighteen and twenty, a few, like "A Rose of Women" and "To the Cuckoo" even earlier. Two groups of poems stand out: the political poems were about Ireland and her tragic hero, Parnell. Among tributes may be mentioned the one on Goethe. But in "Envoi" the young poet bids adieu to the foreign fields, the Hellenic Muses and announces his return home:

Pale poems, weak poems ---
In Sicilian olive groves no more
Or seldom must my footprints now be seen,
Nor tread Athenian lanes, nor yet explore
Parnassus or thy voiceful shores, O Hippocrene.
Me from here lotus throne Sarswati
Has called to regions of eternal snow
And Ganges pacing to the southern sea.

Ganges upon whose shores the flowers of Eden blow. ("Envoi")

The poet seems unaccountably severe with himself. In any case, 'the flowers of Eden' betrays the classicist. But in true essence the regions of eternal snow appear in the poems that follow and the poet takes up the oldest theme known to mankind – love, deathless love.

These narrative poems, of heroic and romantic love, are based on the mythological characters. The *Urvasie* theme has always been an old favourite of the Indian poets. In the hands of Aurobindo it is passion more than penance that is a felt quality, the passion for love and the passion for beauty. The king, Pururvas, who prays to the silent Himalayas: 'Give her back to me, O mountain, give her back' later finds the object of his adoration, abandoned on the cold hillside a lily mishandled:

Perfect she lay amid her tresses
Like a mishandled lily luminous,
As she had fallen. From the lucid robe
One shoulder gleamed and golden breast left bare,
Divinely lifting, one gold arm was flung
A warm rich splendour exquisitely outlined
Against the dazzling whiteness, and her face
Was as a fallen moon among the snows.

(*Urvasie: A Poem*)
The meeting of the lovers provides one of the most glowing passages in the poem and we shall like to cite it here, in full:

She a leaf
Before a gust among the nearing trees
Cowered. But, all a sea of mighty joy
Rushing and swallowing up the golden sand,
With a great cry and glad Pururavus
Seized her and caught her to his bosom thrilled,
Clinging and shuddering. All her wonderful hair
Loosened and the wind seized and bore it streaming
Over the shoulder of Pururavus
And on his cheeks a softness. She overborne,
Panting with inarticulate murmurs lay,
Like a slim tree half seen through driving hail,
Her naked arms clasping his neck, her cheek
And golden throat averted, and wide trouble
In her large eyes bewildered with their bliss.
With her sweet limbs all his, feeling her breasts
Tumultuous up against his beating heart,
He kissed the glorious mouth of heaven's desire.
So clung they two as shipwrecked in a surge.
Then strong Pururavus, with golden eyes,
Mastering hers, cried tremulous: 'O beloved,
O miser of thy rich and happy voice,
One word, one word to tell me that thou lovest'.
And Urvasie, all broken on his bosom,
Her godhead in his passion lost, moaned out,
From her imprisoned breasts, 'my lord! My love!'

This is love poetry as its best. Passages of such glowing passion and sweep, of grand conceptions, stately expressions and noble sallies of imagination are nowhere to be found in the entire corpus of Indian English Poetry, except in Sri Aurobindo. Urvasie and the companion poem Love and Death, describing the story of 'Ruru and Priyumbada' are in the tradition of great love poetry. Both Urvasie and Love and Death, point to the author's enduring concern which he has phrased, elsewhere, a little differently as 'Earth and Love and Doom'. Between these early exercises and the 'inner epic' of his maturity Aurobindo has come a long way from romance to reality.

His next book of verse, Poems (1905) deals with a different world. We are faced with the problem of belief, and soliloquies and debates abound. The mood and manner of these writings explain why in certain minds Sri Aurobindo is equated with the philosopher as poet. In the next poem Baji Prabhou (1910) we are in a different world. Intellectual debates and idealized solutions left behind, the locale of Baji Prabhou is not the Himalayas or the moonlight or the tortured mind of modern Hamlet but the scorching Deccan plateaus, a background of battle. Here Aurobindo chooses an epical episode from Maratha history, Baji Prabhou's defence of gorge against the superior and overwhelming Moghul army.
There can be little doubt that the choice of the theme was expressive of the poet's intense nationalism.

One may wonder how, in *Ahna and Other Poems* (1915) the same poet was writing, at about the same time, the invocation to the 'Mother of Dreams', a poem part aesthetic, part symbolic, link between the world of dreams and of the visionary. The key poem in this volume is no doubt "Ahna". The Argument tells us: 'Ahna, the God of Dawn, descends in the world where amid the strife and trouble of mortality, the Hunters of Joy, the Seekers after knowledge, the Climbers in the quest of Power are toiling up the slopes or waiting in the valleys. As she stands on the mountains of the East, voices of the Hunters of Joy are the first to greet her". The Argument prepares us for the pattern in which the familiar features of reason's rubrics of the mysteries of life are repeated. These are the voices of negation according to which 'Vain in the passion to divine manhood --- None can exceed himself. Shun the light of the ideal and chimera --- Curb heart's impatience, bind the desires down, pause from self — vexing.' But the passion to divine manhood is an evolving theme in Aurobindonean imagination and when, years later out of 'the great mass of poems written during the twenties and thirties', a few short poems like *Six Poems* (1934), *Poems* (1941) and *Poems Past and Present* (1946) were published, the change and impact were unmistakable. If

there had been any doubt about the quality and direction of the Aurobindonean muse, his role and rank as a poet, these poems dispel them effectively. There is for instance, ‘Nirvana’ the poetry of what he has elsewhere called ‘open realization’. There is the poem “Thought-the Paraclete” which attempts to project in terms of poetry of the flight of thought, as it takes off from the normal intellectual plane, and sweeps across the illumined, intuitive and overmental regions, finally disappearing bound for the ultimate. The central idea of the poem which is the transformation in the self brought about as a result of the ascent of the Consciousness to the superlative level, is suggested by the imagery and the music, rather than closely argued out in terms of logical reason. We are expected to proceed from light to light, from one luminous revelation to another, and anon to the next, and so on, till we arrive at and are lost in the rich calm of the wonderful last line ‘Self was lost, lone, limitless, nude, immune.’ Of the four separate ‘movements’ in the poem, the first describes limited human Thought invading the realms of the Invisible and being ‘self lost in the vasts of God’. The second movement follows Thought’s progress from Mind to Higher Mind, from Higher Mind to Illumined Mind, from Illumined Mind to Intuition, and from Intuition to Overmind. The third movement describes Thought racing beyond Overmind. And disappearing in the region of the Supermind. The last line marks the concluding movement: the realization of the infinite Self is now
complete, the ego is dead, the self is bare of all the sheaths of Ignorance — it is 'lone, limitless, nude, immune.'

"The Bird of Fire" and "Rose of God" are other remarkable poems. As poetry of prayer and vision, of poetry as a variation of the sacred name, "Rose of God" has few equals. The poem defines the term and end of Aurobindonean poetry as well as of his Yoga: it is the 'outbreak of the Godhead in man'. In his adventure of consciousness poetry is Sri Aurobindo's chosen strategy. If, as Middleton Murry once said, we require from the highest poetry that it should not merely thrill us but also still us what better proof can we point to than these poems.

Poems Past and Present (1946) is a record mostly of spiritual experiences and a further proof of the kind of writing he had hinted at in The Future Poetry. "Bride of Fire" reminds us of the earlier "Rose of God". A poem of holy love, the first two lines of the opening stanza comprise a prayer or an act, while the third and fourth set forth the conditions of the embodiment.

Bride of the fire, clasp me now close,
Bride of the fire!
I have shade the bloom of the earthly rose,
I have slain desire ("Bride of Fire")

\(^6\) Ibid. p. 168.
A posthumous publication of forty-eight poems, mostly sonnets, *Last Poems* (1953) was among the last to be written by Sri Aurobindo. In 1957 came *More Poems*, it contained some early works, a few fragments as well as political poems and sonnet. Rarely has the sonnet been put to such wide use as in Sri Aurobindo, as a vehicle of ontological discourse inspired by 'some greater voice and mightier vision'. Most of the poems in the collection, the *Last Poems* (1952) are autobiographical and mystic in nature. They show Aurobindo's personal strivings to reach God and again the harmonious and poised feeling of being with God. The poems are all remarkable for their lyrical intensity, creative force and the urgency of feelings. The first poem in this collection bears the title "The Divine Hearing" Here the *advaitic* concept of the universal spirit being one is expressed in a deeply personal way. The poet feels the Universal Being flowing within him. It is not the knowledge of *advaitic* philosophy that he is trying to reveal here, but it is the felt experience which is clear in the title itself, that he is trying to recreate in words. It is the Divine Hearing, he hears the Divine tone in every voice of this world, the first line, though it looks like a statement, has a tinge of serenity, calmness and vastness about it: 'All sounds, all voices have become thy voice'. He supports this view in the remaining part of the poem. He stretches the 'All' into the innumerable things of the world. The one voice is reflected in the music, in the thunder and in the cry of the birds, in life's babble, both its sorrows and its
joys. The world itself is a wonder and all the creations in it breathe wonder - tones because they are all the features of the one Eternal Spirit: 'All now are wonder - tones and themes of Thee'. The prosaic word 'theme' has attained a higher and an elevated meaning here, as Sri Aurobindo says: 'A phrase, a word or line may be quite simple and ordinary and yet taken with another phrase, line or word become the perfect thing.' In the last couplet Aurobindo concentrates on the same thought with a sureness of touch:

A secret harmony steals through the blind heart
And all grows beautiful because Thou art.

The secret harmony exists in every being whether it is aware of it or not and that is the sole cause for the beauty of the world. The poet reveals the personal experience of what we might dogmatically call the adwaitic principle. It fulfills our experience of a mystic poem. What we expect such poetry to give us is not a system of thought but the glow and the force of thought, not philosophy; what mystic poetry should give us again is not a laborious transcription of such supernormal experience, but rather, a re-enacting—a repetition—of the experience in which we may ourselves be totally and inescapably engaged. Philosophical poetry, like mystical poetry is difficult to achieve, but not impossible. The poem seems to illustrate the idea that, 'if he has the passion, then

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7 Letters of Sri Aurobindo, opp. cit., p. 25
even a philosophical statement of it he can surcharge with this sense of power, force, light and beauty.\footnote{8}

We find, Sri Aurobindo, the mystic after having striven to be with God, achieves his goal and the soul’s vision of such a union is revealed to us in the poem, “The Divine Hearing”. “Krishna” is another such poem in which the poet reveals his union with Lord Kirshna. The opening of the poem suggests the relief that the poet experiences at the feet of God: ‘I who have felt the hungry heart of earth / Aspiring beyond heaven to Krishna’s feet’. It is a moment of feeling of oneness with God for the poet; this feeling of oneness, the moment of his union with God is given to us in the lines:

\begin{quote}
Nearer and nearer now the music draws,
Life shudders with a strange felicity:
All nature is wide enamoured pause
Hoping her lord to touch, to clasp, to be. ("Krishna")
\end{quote}

Perhaps this is one of the greatest expressions of Aurobindo’s mystic experiences. The whole idea is conceived as a beloved’s meeting of his Lover, one of the ways in which the mystic seeks his God. This subtle movement of his soul’s experience is caught in a few words. These lines prove Sri Aurobindo’s statement: ‘There is no incompatibility between spirituality and creative activity --- they can be united’, as it is the inner chord of the soul that experiences and expresses

\footnote{8 Ibid., p. 128.}
the feelings and not the mere thinking mind --- Neither the intelligence, the imagination, nor the ears are the true recipients of the poetic delight, even as they are not its true creators, they are only its channels and instruments; the true creator, the true hearer is the soul. Again in the last couplet of the poem, the poet expresses his satisfaction which presents the peace in his soul: ‘For this one moment lived the ages past / The world now throbs fulfilled in me at last’.

There is another poem from an earlier period of his creative activity, “Revelation”, which suggests the sudden leaping up of the consciousness of Divinity in the poem. The mystic vision ends with the couplet: ‘Someone of the heavenly rout / From behind the veil ran out’. The mystic vision is compared to a thought disappearing before the mind is able to catch it: ‘as a thought / Escapes the mind ere it is caught’. The thought that comes to the mind of the poet is elusive and teasing and cannot be grasped easily.

Another poem which commands our attention is “Shiva”. The theme of the poem again is the union of the Being with the spirit. But the conception of union is here different from the one expressed in the poem “Krishna”. This mystic experience is conceived as the consummation of the union of the Devotee and the Deity, viewed through the conjugal love of Shiva and Parvathi. The beginning of the poem again and
again brings an atmosphere of serenity and peaceful surroundings where Shiva sits alone meditating:

Once the white summit of eternity
A single soul of bare infinities,
Guarded he keeps by a fire – screen of peace
His mystic loneliness of nude ecstasy. ("Shiva")

There is both the power and the pure environment around Shiva. The pictorial presentation of Shiva’s feature poses the perfect picture of Lord Shiva as conceived in Indian mythology. The words ‘white’, ‘eternity’, ‘bare’, ‘Peace’, ‘loneliness’ and ‘nude’ evoke the image of Shiva before us, and these words command a ‘smiling sureness of touch and inner breath of perfect perfection born, not made in the words themselves’. But after a pause, in his mood of immense delight, Shiva stretches his sight over the depths and sees the Mighty Mother waiting to be received:

But, touched by an immense delight to be,
He looks across unending depths and sees
Musing amidst the inconscient silences
The Mighty Mother’s dumb felicity. ("Shiva")

The ‘Mighty Mother’ responds to the sight of Lord Shiva and rises with felicity to unite with him. The inner throbs of the heart of its Mother while reaching the spirit is seen in the following lines:
Half now awake she rises to his glance;
Then, moved to circling by her heart-beats will,
The rhythmic worlds describe that passionate-dance.

The result of this Eternal Dance of Shiva with Parvathi is the rhythmic world created by it. From the passion dance evolves this 'rhythmic world'. The last three lines describe the final union:

Life springs in her and Mind is born; her face
She lifts to Him who is Herself, until
The spirit leaps into the spirit's embrace.

The Divine awakening comes and there is a mystic approach and a final reaching of the Goal. The poem satisfies the expectations of a reader who seeks in the poet's experience, 'his vision of its beauty, its power, his thrilled reception of it, his joy in it that he tries to convey by an utmost perfection in word and rhythm'.

These short poems of lyrical intensity and mystic themes belongs to the last phase of Aurobindo's poetic career. The notes of mysticism, however, rings through Aurobindo's poetry right from the beginning and culminates in Savitri, the celebrated epic. The mystical poems of Sri Aurobindo have been divined into four groupings: poems written in 1895 – 1908; in 1908 – 1930; in 1930 – 1950; and, Savitri. The

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9 Letters of Sri Aurobindo (III Series) p. 128.
10 Makrand Paranjpe, opp. cit., p. 79.
relevant poems in the first section, 1895 – 1908 are short poems which illustrate the first blossoming of Sri Aurobindo’s mysticism. Those in the seconds section, 1908 – 1930, are mainly short poems, sonnets, and those in the third section, 1930 – 1950, are poems in new metres. Savitri, because of its length and dimensions is best considered as a unit in itself.

Sri Aurobindo had a classical bent of mind. In his delineation of characters and in his capacity to form grand conceptions, deep thoughts, stately expressions and noble sallies of imagination he remains unrivalled in the entire corpus of Indian English Poetry. In poems after poems these traits of his poetry are revealed to us. In “Ilion” he revives his own typical brand of Homeric epic. Not only it impresses us by its bulk and the sheer audacity of its conception, but also by the lavish amplitude of its execution. The description of Dawn with which the poem opens is among the finest things in Sri Aurobindo, surpassed only by the evocation of ‘The symbol Dawn’ in Savitri, the debate of the Trojan statesmen – recalling the debate of the fallen angels in Book II of Paradise Lost is elaborated at almost extravagant length. But his greater achievement was in Savitri. The legendary story, the symbolic overtones, the hint of Savitri’s Journey into the continents of Night, Twilight and Day, the Savitri – Yama dialectic, and above all the character of the heroine who is a radiant column of sheer light and saviour strength had always
attracted Sri Aurobindo. This is how he brings out the magnificent and grand delineation of his heroine:

A wide self-giving was her native act;  
A magnanimity as of sea or sky  
Enveloped with all its greatness all that came  
And gave a sense as of a greatened world:  
Her kindly care was a sweet temperate sun,  
Her high passion a blue heaven's equipoise—  
A deep of compassion, a hushed sanctuary,  
Her inward help unbarred a gate in heaven;  
The whole world could take refuge in her single heart,  

(Savitri, p. 19)

This stupendous ambrosial truth about Savitri's power of love—'The world could take refuge in her heart'—must have endlessly fascinated Sri Aurobindo.

Indian literature is not lacking in images of holy wedded love. Sita, Draupadi, Sakuntala, Damayanti - these among others - have inspired poets to immortal song. But none of these heroines quite measures up consistently to the fierce purity, purpose, preparedness and puissance of Savitri. None of the heroines was really as free to choose and be chosen as Savitri. And their wedded lives ran by no means a smooth course. Rama sent Sita away to the forest; Draupadi was almost gambled away; Sakuntala was too easily won and too causally rejected; Damayanti was cruelly abandoned in the
forest by her husband. They were all mastered, at one time or another, by circumstances; only Savitri is mistress of circumstance all the time. She does not falter, she does not fumble, she does not weep; and ever she indignantly rejects the very idea of failure. Her light ultimately eats up the darkness of the dark God.\textsuperscript{11}

The two opposed each other face to face,
His being like a huge fort of darkness towered;
Around it her life grew, an ocean's siege ---
Light like a burning tongue licked up his thoughts,
Light was luminous torture in his heart,
Light coursed, a splendid agony, through its nerves;
His darkness muttered perishing in her blaze.

\textit{(Savitri, p. 748.)}

And so death is dead, though only to revive as a god of light.
And Satyavan is redeemed indeed, and the earth is assured of a series of new times charged with the glory of heaven:

This 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. \textit{(Savitri, p. 796)}

\textit{Savitri} as a poem has many passages of such sustained height of inspiration, exceptional intensity and stately

expressions. Thus, when the whole poem moves on such heights of revelation, inspiration, and illumination and never comes down to a lower plane, it becomes difficult for us to make a choice of passages with special poetical merit. But there are single lines, double lines, triple lines, four lines throughout the poem that have a power of poetic beauty and excellence that enthrall our mind and reach an Upanishadic height. Notice, for example, the single lines. Carrying concentrated expression of the poetic vision, they sink into our mind and go on echoing with wealth of suggestions:

Death's grip can break our bodies, not our souls. (p. 490)
My love shall outlast the world. (p. 490)
Fate's law may change; but not my spirit's will. (p. 490)
My strength is not the titan's, it is God's. (p. 493)
Our lives are caught in an ambiguous net. (p. 507)
Man must overcome or miss his higher fate. (p. 507)
Alone she is equal to her mighty task. (p. 512)
The whole world could take refuge in her single heart. (p. 19)
Open God's door, enter into his trance. (p. 541)
Only by suffering can I scale. (p. 574)
There is a purpose in each stumble and fall. (p. 738)
I lay my hands upon thy heart of love. (p. 785)
This earthly life become life divine. (p. 798)

And the two lines:

In the enormous emptiness of thy mind
thou shalt see the Eternal's body in the world. (p. 541)
Nature’s most careless lolling is a pose
Preparing some forward step, some deep result.  (p. 738)

A Lover leaning from his cloister’s door
Gathers the whole world into his single breast.  (p. 710)

Life was his drama and the vast a stage,
The Universe was his body, God its soul.  (p. 631)

The word I have spoken can never be erased
It is written in the record book of God.  (p. 490)

My love is not a craving of the flesh
It came to me from God, to God returns.  (p. 688)

Earth is the heroic spirit’s battlefield,
The forge where the Arch-mason shapes his works.  (p. 770)

And the three lines:

They were tied in the single circling of their days
Together by loves unseen atmosphere,
Inseparable like the earth and sky.  (p. 606)

Life now became a sure approach to God,
Existence a divine experiment
And cosmos the soul’s opportunity.  (p. 50)
And the four lines:

And intolerant of the poverty of Time
Her passion catching at the fugitive hours
Willed the expense of centuries in one day
Of prodigal love and the surf of ecstasy --- (p. 534)

In a simple purity of emptiness
Her mind knelt down before the unknowable
All was abolished save her naked self
And the prostrate yearning of her surrendered heart---(p. 592)

Her high nude soul,
Stripped of the girdle of mortality,
Against fixed destiny and the grooves of law
Stood up in its sheer will a primal force--- (p. 656)

If one wishes, one can add a long list of beautiful and
illustrative examples to those listed above. It is not our
intention to do so here, as those noted above are in themselves sufficient enough to show the grandeur of thought
and expression achieved by Sri Aurobindo. Indeed what
Johnson said of Milton is absolutely true of Sri Aurobindo:
'Which other mind soared so high and sustained its flight for
so long' (Life of Milton). V.K. Gokak has rightly written: 'Like Dante and Milton he produced in Savitri, an epic of universal
significance. Like Goethe, he picked up an ancient story and
developed it as a legend summing up the past, a symbol
projecting the future and a philosophy based on his own
experience. He fulfilled the promise of the subjective epic and introspective lyricism which had opened so brilliantly with Wordsworth, Shelley and Keats.\(^\text{12}\) P. Lal who once condemned *Savitri* as 'greasy, weak-spined and purple adjectived' later modified his stand and accepted Aurobindo as the Milton of Indian English Poetry.\(^\text{13}\)

Love has always inspired the best and the majority of the world's literary works. Sarojini Naidu is no exception; her love poems outnumber all others. Almost every one poem in three among the poems of Sarojini Naidu is a love poem of one kind or other.\(^\text{14}\) The longing of lovers for each other is expressed with truly oriental splendour in "A Rajput Love Song". "A Persian Love Song", which comes immediately after, exhibits the serener mood of lovers who are conscious of their oneness through love. The lover does not know why, when his beloved is glad, or sad, or at rest, or pain, he feels exactly what she feels; but he has an inkling of the possible explanation. But the ecstasy of loving and being loved can be so overpowering as to be almost unbearable as is evident in "Ecstasy":

Cover mine eyes, O my love!
Mine eyes that are weary of bliss
As of light that is poignant and strong;


\(^{13}\) Sri K.R. Srinivas Inyengar, opp. cit., p. 653.

O silence my lips with a kiss,
My lips that are weary of song!
Shelter my soul, O my love!
My soul is bent low with the pain
And the burden of love like the grace
Of a flower that is smitten with rain.
O shelter my soul from thy face!

Another aspect of love is revealed elsewhere. Thus, in “The Poet’s Love Song”, the poet, far away from her lover, is rapt in dreams all day; but not so at night: ‘But in the desolate hour of midnight --- my soul hungers for thy voice’. In “Alone” the sense of loneliness is constant ‘neither the ‘accustomed alleys of delight’ nor the ‘orchards of the night’ bring any relief; the maiden breast the ‘tides of life’s familiar streams’. In “The Garden Vigil” the woman, separated from her lover, finds comfort in apostrophizing the morning star. In other poems something more than the pathos of separation is expressed. In “A Love Song from the North” the forsaken one cannot bear to hear the papeeha’s call for similar joyous sights and sounds, for they only recall dreams of delights that are gone. In “Caprice” and in “Destiny” we are shown how maiden’s hearts are broken by those unworthy of their love. In “Longing” the heart, thus broken, still hopes for the return of the wayward lover. Amid the gleaming pageant of life that crowds round the sadness of the maiden’s days and nights, she still harbours a hope to ‘reach the comfort of your
breast.' "The Festival of Memory" shows that the memory of a love however transient is a dear memory.

But all these are scattered poems. There is a constellation of love poems at the end of her last volume, and the twenty-four poems that form the group are significantly given the collective title, "The Temple". The deep mystic fervour that inspired them is stressed with the subtitle 'A Pilgrimage of Love'. The pilgrimage towards the Temple is carefully worked out in three stages of eight poems each. The pilgrimage begins with 'The Gate of Delight' and the poems of this stage are calculated to demonstrate that in Love's bondage is true freedom, and true bliss in the sacrifices it demands. In the opening poem, 'The Offering', the woman, unable to bring beauty or greatness to Love's shrine, can yet bring a devotion that asks for no recompense. Similarly, the devotee of 'The Feast' is content to smear her head and eyelids with the 'entranced and flowering dust' that Love has honoured with his tread, happy to bear Love's foot-prints on her breast, and eager to have as a priceless boon 'All the sorrows of your years / All the secret of your tears.' In 'Ecstasy' the woman cares not at all for the glories that spring brings. In 'Lute-Song' the beloved tells her that he needs no mirror, no lute, no silks. Her eyes, her voice, her heart will serve instead. 'If you call me I will come', says the maiden in the next poem. In the sins of love the poet asks for forgiveness for the sins of looking on the face of her lover, touching his
flesh, assailing him with her silence or her song. ‘The Desire of Love’ is a short, simple song, but intense and packed with passion. The last of the eight poems in this section is ‘The Vision of Love’. The woman has lost all knowledge except of her beloved. To her enraptured sight he is the sovereign and sweet reality, the splendour of the morning star, the might and the magic of the sea, the subtle fragrance of the spring, the fruit of all Time’s harvesting; he is the sacred fount from which her spirit draws all sustenance; he is the temple of her woe and bliss.

But issuing through the Gate of Delight, the pilgrim of Love must tread, the path of tears – tears of humiliation. True love, long-suffering and self-denying, must overcome pride, whether in the loved one’s spirit or in the lover’s own. Accordingly, in the eight poems that mark ‘The Path of Tears’ the faithful lover bewails the other’s pride and disdain and cruelty. In the opening poem, ‘The Sorrow of Love’, the woman complains that her beloved has turned his face away, perhaps because he is afraid that his strength and pride will suffer if he continues to give himself to her. In ‘The Silence of Love’, she is determined that, though she has given her lover the whole joy of her flesh and the treasure of her soul, she will demand no answering gift from him. ‘The Menace of Love’ opens with the ruthless, pride of the loved one and closes with the lover’s dilemma: ‘--- if I shall save or slay you / As you lie spent and broken at my feet’! But even
humiliation at the loved one's hand is sweet and is hugged as a rich reward. Witness, for example, 'Love's Guerdon' which closes with:

You plucked my heart and broke it, O my Love,
And bleeding flung it down!...
Sweeter to die thus trodden of your feet,
Than reign apart upon an ivory seat
Crowned in a lovely rapture of renown.

In desperation at her plight the lover, in 'If You Were Dead', is prepared to welcome the loved one's death. The broken-hearted maiden, in 'Supplication', would pardon all the wrongs done to her. Even the withering of all her hopes and the utter deadness of her life would seem nothing to her if only she could find relief in tears. This is all she asks from the loved one. The loved one, drenched with life drops of the heart he has killed is the Slayer, in the poem of that name. But this kind of conceit is carried even further in the last poem of this section 'The Secret'. And then to the Sanctuary, the shrine at which the lover must be prepared to worship with the utmost devotion, even to the point of a joyous surrender of life itself. Accordingly, in the first of the eight poems in 'The Sanctuary', entitled 'The Fear of Love', the maiden, for fear of any harm coming to her beloved, would build a shrine for him against covetous Time and Fate. A similar passionate devotion inspires 'The Illusion of Love'. In 'The Worship of Love', she asks to be crushed by her lover
like a lemon leaf or basil bloom and to be burnt like a sandal grain. Then follow 'Love Triumphant', 'Love Omnipotent', and 'Love Transcendent'. In the first the woman would shield her beloved from the world's horror or hate even if his hands were stained with blood - guiltiness, she would endure any suffering to succour him and hush his anguish in her breast. In the second, she similarly expressed her readiness to undertake the most arduous or impossible task for her beloved's sake. The third, 'Love Transcendent', visualizes the Day of Judgement, when her beloved, 'Saint with the sinless eyes,' will be crowned amid the peace anointed and she herself will be hurled from Heaven's high battlement. But her fall, then, will be brightened by the memory of his radiant face, and she will sing a paean to thrill the dead with his deathless name. In 'Invocation ' the woman in love calls upon the Star of her Trust to shine upon her straggling spirit and raise it; she is confident that his warmth and grief and stern agonizing silence can chasten her spirit. And finally there is 'Devotion', direct and brief: 'Love, I am yours to lie in your breast like a flower,/ Or burn like a weed for your sake in the flame of hell.'

There is much in Sarojini Naidu's love poetry which is extravagant, needlessly wordy, or merely pretty. But it does reveal a sensitive and passionate spirit. Apart from the aches of ecstasies of love, Indian myth and legend, Indian beliefs

15 Ibid., p. 40.
and attitudes find a reflection in Sarojini Naidu’s poetry—poem after poem reveals its basic inspiration and theme or in its incidental imagery and allusions, the native Indian mind and outlook of the poem. Thus we have “Suttee” ; “Leili” ; “Damyanti to Nala in the Hour of Exile” ; ‘To a Buddha seated on a Lotus’ ; “Vasant Panchami”, ‘The Festival of Servants’ ; “Song of Radha”, “The Milkmaid”; “Hymn to India”, “Lord of Rain” ; “The Temple” ;”Lakshmi”, “The Lotus Born”; “The Flute Player of Brindaban” ; “Kali the Mother”—the tiles of which clearly carry the Indian identity.

The simple joys and hopes and fears and lives of the common folk in town and country ; the irresistible fascination which nature, especially at springtime, exercises over her, the ever present challenge of suffering and loss to the human spirit of Death to Life, these are some of the recurrent themes to which Sarojini Naidu returns again and again in her poetry. They are, of course, not mutually exclusive, and they often overlap, but in song and sonnet, in poems that are narrative in style and in those that are openly and plainly lyrical she returns—if not exclusively, then predominantly to one or the other of these favourite themes.¹⁶

"Indian Weavers", "Street Cries", "In The Bazars of Hyderabad" and "Bangle Sellers" are a class in themselves within the larger class of folk poem. These poems focus

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 23.
poetic attention on common men and women at their common daily tasks and at the same time relate their activities and vocations to the vicissitudes and changing phases of human life. The appeal of Nature, and particularly of spring, inspired a number of Sarojini Naidu’s poems. Pretty as well as sincere; they are all expressions of her genuine excitement over the sights and sounds and scents of the earth, especially in spring. A group of four poems - In "Praise of Gulmohur Blossoms", "Nasturtiums", "Golden Cassia", and "Champak Blossoms" - are dedicated to individual manifestations of Nature's beauty. Then, there are over a dozen poems in which Sarojini Naidu is concerned wholly with the theme of the challenge of suffering and pain and death to life. Thus, we have the sonnet "Love and Death" which expresses the utter despair voiced by the poet, while in another poem, "To the God of Pain", she sees herself as an unwilling priestess in the temple of the god. Exhausted and completely spent, she craves only for the release from his service. In another, "Past and Future", faced with the future - the past having retreated like a hermit to his cell - she stands expectant but not knowing what to expect. In varying degree these poems reveal a spirit crushed and awed by fate. A realization of the helplessness of herself and her kind before the wind of change, which blows across the ways of men and blows away one sorrow only to bring another enters into the profoundly moving poem "To A Buddha Seated on a Lotus". What mystic rapture, what peace, unknown to the world of
men, she asks, is the secret of Lord Buddha, seated on his Lotus throne? She recalls by way of contrast the sufferings and strife, ‘the strenuous lessons of defeat’, the hope deferred, the futile strivings of the spirit, the unsatisfied hunger of the soul, which are our common destiny. Puzzled, she turns to the Buddha:

The end elusive and afar,
Steel lures as with its beckoning flight,
And all our mortal moments are
A session of the infinite,
How shall we reach the great unknown
Nirvana of thy Lotus – throne?

A different mood emerges in the three poems, "Forest", "Transience", and "At Twilight". Thus, in the first of these poems, she goes into the forest to burn the dear dreams that are dead, ‘Nay, do not grieve tho’ life be full of sadness’ is the very opening line of "Transience". The recoil from despair and the initial despair are both stronger in "At Twilight". Weary, the poet seeks kind Death at twilight. "The Poet to Death", "Death and Life", "Life", "The Soul’s Prayer", "Invincible", "A Challenge to Fate" and finally, "In Salutation to the Eternal Peace" are poems dealing with the theme of suffering, pain, life and death.

Sarojini Naidu’s poetry is a pure success at evoking the experience of beauty, in the reader. The sense of beauty
experience is not of particular things but is the sense of beauty in all things as discussed in the various themes of her poetry.

Thus, Sarojini Naidu undeniably belongs to the romantic school, and it is the romantic in her that in its most passionate mood brings about a heightening of the consciousness. There is in her poetry a genuine search for beauty and a realization that the beautiful has an independent value. It thus reinforces the view that art is self-sufficient and that the harmonizing value of poetry is present in the beauty of art itself.

Sarojini Naidu did not seek to grapple with life's intricate problems as a philosopher does. There were only situations for her that made her nerves 'tingle' and stirred her into creation. Life's endless variety excited her, its colour dazzled her, its beauty intoxicated her. Thus some of her poems, as we have already seen, quiver with the passion of love, some are effusions of the rapture of spring, some transport us into the world of inner ecstasy, while some others to the agonies of suffering and pain, life and death.

Thus Sarojini Naidu's poetry reveals that she was endowed with an extraordinary sense for describing objects with accurate details. The style of her poems has the capacity to communicate the poet's experience as the felt experience of the reader. While her poetry does not make any pretence to
grand conceptions, deep thoughts and stately expressions, all essential ingredients of the sublime, they certainly give us genuine poetry throbbing with life.

Independence in India did not bring a change only in the socio-economic and political fields but in the field of literature as well. New movements in literature are the new uses of language. The new mind requires the new voice, and the new voice is discovered by the writer's genius for intimately registering the idiom of his own world.¹⁷

Poets like Nissim Ezekiel, P. Lal, Shiv K. Kumar, A.K. Ramanujan, R. Parthasarathy, Jayant Mahapatra, Arun Kolatkar, K.N. Daruwalla, Kamla Das, Dom Moraes, Gieve Patel, Adil Jussawala, Pritish Nandy, A.K. Mehrotra and many others speak in a new voice. Although they retain some of the themes consciously or otherwise, of the earlier poets, their idiom, style, syntax, speak of their freedom in handling themes.¹⁸ This is best illustrated in their attitude to and their treatment of the theme of love, one of the three permanent themes - the other two being life and death - of poetry, and for that matter of literature. It has always occupied a central place in the realms of Indian English Poetry. We have already seen how it has been delineated in the poetry of Toru Dutt, Sri Aurobindo and Sarojini Naidu.

¹⁸ Ibid. p. 5.
The theme of love as delineated in the hands of the new poets takes a different shape with definite overtones of physical and corporeal. Naturally, instead of devotion there is lust. Thus we have Nissim Ezekiel, one of the pioneers of 'new' poetry in English writing freely, frankly and openly on sex. This is traceable from the very first poem "A Time to change" where the poet talks of the 'Debtors to the whore of love', 'the flesh defiled by dreams of flesh'. Neither a romantic dreamer nor a Platonic, he holds an altogether different stance in his approach to sex and women resulting in highly sensual descriptions of the human organs and love making in bed. 19

The poet is 'painfully and poignantly aware of the flesh, its insistent urges, its stark ecstasies, its disturbing filiations with the mind'. 20 Thus, many of the poems included in A Time to Change express the poets constant desire to affirm to all engrossing and reciprocal love of woman. The second anthology, Sixty Poems, carries the impulse even further. "Situation" is much like "An Affair" where the immediate moment of love occupies the participants. In "Lines", there is a tacit approval of the act of love. Love in its bare form, in and outside marriage has occupied the poet in many of his early poems. Thus "Marriage Poem" is reminiscent of "To a Certain Lady". The poet is actually aware of the fibers of

flesh and desire. As a poet of the body, he has a penchant for representing the physical features of a woman in a number of ways. As already noted, these representations are highly sensuous. One may like to cite the poem entitled "Descriptions" as one such instance:

I will begin but how should I begin?
With hair, your hair,
remembered hair,
touched, smelt, lying silent there
upon your head, beneath your arms
and then between your thighs a wonder
of hair --- ("Descriptions")

One wonders what is there so 'poetic' about 'the image of hair, a single element in the woman's total composition', which has been rendered, in the eyes of a critic, 'with a touch of wonder, excitement and novelty.'

One feels, on the other hand, that such sensuous descriptions of the human organs particularly in the last two lines border on the verge of obscenity and shows the weird and grotesque imagination of the poet bereft of any noble sallies of imagination and deep thoughts.

The theme of body and its sensuous descriptions is further explored in 'The Female Image' where the various female

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adjuncts tend to occupy the poet both in the mind and outside the home. The musings on the female body 'Shall her belly know the lust of man? / 'And shall he be contended?' is obsessive. The poet's mind is full of the erotic images of the woman's body as he returns home: 'And on my lips a hurricane of Helen's kisses'.

In all anthologies of Nissim Ezekiel up to the latest *Poems 1983-1988* the nature of this experience of the poet is not radically different. Thus the poet's mind seems to be occupied with 'breasts and buttocks', 22 'breasts and thighs' 23, 'thighs as tree – trunks' 24, 'lips and thighs' 25, 'small breasts full breasts' 26. In 'Passion Poems', *Hymn in Darkness* (1976) the poet refers to Sanskrit poets and mythology and holds them as his model for his own sexual frenzy and unabated erotic zeal. Notice how even in old age he uses Radha and Krishna myth as a mask for his own sexuality:

Radha says she longs for Krishna
As the soul longs for union with God.
Krishna likes the idea.

("Ten Poems in the Greek Anthology Mode")

23 Ibid. p. 16.
24 Ibid. p. 249.
25 Ibid. p. 25.
26 Ibid. p. 250.
The Radha-Krishna myth has also been used by Kamla Das to hide her own sensuality and sexuality. With frankness and openness unusual in the Indian context Kamla Das expresses her need for love and goes a step forward by using words and lines such as 'my pubis', 'lesbian', 'figid', 'hetero', 'poor lust', 'flamboyant love', 'endless female hungers', 'menstrual blood', 'the musk of seat between the breasts' 'the jerky way he urinates' and 'you dribbled spittle into my mouth'. Das is credited with, as noted in the previous chapter, bringing the confessional poetry of the likes of Sylvia Plath and Anne Sexton which was later followed and practised by a number of women poets who were influenced by Kamla Das.

Kamla Das’s outpourings pertain to a particular region which readily becomes a talking point in a cocktail circuit:

They did this to her, the men who knew her, the man
She loved, who loved her not enough, being selfish
And a coward, the husband who neither loved nor
Used her, but was a ruthless watcher, and the band
Of cynics she turned to, clinging to their chests where
New hair sprouted like great-winged moths, burrowing her
Face into their smells and their young lusts to forget ---

("The Sunshine Cat")

Several of her poems are puerile adolescent fragments as for example the following:
Love
Until I found you,
I wrote verse, drew pictures
And, went out friends
For walks ---
Now that I love you,
Curléd like an old mongrel
My life lie, content,
In you---

("The Old Playhouse and Other Poems", p. 23)

'The whole frame of the poem', said Donne 'is beating out of a piece of gold', and added, 'but the last clause is like the impression of the stamp and it is that which makes it current'.

Kamla Das, being a poet of emotion, may inaugurate her poems well, but she is unaware of the craft of consummate culmination. For example, the title poem "The Descendants", begins effectively enough:

We have spent our youth in gentle sinning
Exchanging some insubstantial love ---

The narrative, construed as a guiltless reflection of the couple's infidelities to each other, does not conclude logically. The end, in fact, is a non-sequitur:

--- no, we are not going to be
Ever redeemed, or made new ("The Descendents")
Her outpourings in poem after poem unnerves the reader. She rationalises her escapades with other men by blaming her husband:

You let me toss my youth like coins
--- you let your wife seek ecstasy in other's arms.

("A Man is a Season")

The unabashed celebration of the physical and corporeal, startling, daring and revealing to the utmost is one of the dominating themes of India English Poetry. Thus we have Shiv K. Kumar talking of 'the vaginal creaks', the 'thrusts' 'and the consummation' in Cobwebs in The Sun (p. 48. 1974), the juxtaposition of the 'open – thighed' and 'closed – fists' in "Kovalam Beach" and his exploration of desire, this time juxtaposing desire with age in Woolgathering (1998). Then, there is Jayant Mahapatra exploring the intricacies of human relationships, especially those of lovers. Love offers a sort of relief from the uncertainties of life and this has been probed rigorously in poems like "Lost" and "The Logic". But for Mahapatra also sexual attraction for some woman or women often remains the disguised subject. What is to be noted is that there is always a lifting of inhibitions in the expressions of sexuality and desire bereft of noble love and noble conceptions.

We find a marked change in the attitude to and description of the scenes of nature also. Thus the poets no longer sing of
the glories of nature, its radiant beauty, brightness, magnificence and splendour as celebrated in the earlier poetry. Instead, they now fathom its darkness. A very different kind of treatment is given to river in A.K. Ramanujan’s "A River". Instead of a traditional song of praise for the full river, Ramanujan gives us what he sees as the villager’s real experience. The river is beautiful in the summer, but when it floods, it causes suffering that is not at all poetic. Poems on rivers abound in Indian English Poetry. So much so that Indian English poets are said to be ‘river poets’. Daruwalla’s Crossing of Rivers is almost entirely devoted to river poems, and some of his earlier poems, too, like, "The Ghagra in Spate" (Under Orion) are about rivers. Then, there are Mehrotra’s "Songs of the Ganga", and Mahapatra’s poems like "On the Bank of the Ganges" (A Rain of Rites), "Way of the River", "Song of the River" (Waiting), "Evening Landscape by the River", "Dead River" and "Again, One Day, Walking by the River" (Life Signs). Parthasarathy, like, Ramanujan, has also written on the river Vaikai. One can get interesting insights into the works of all these poets simply by comparing their attitude to rivers which forms an important part of the theme of nature in Indian English Poetry. Indian landscape gets described in the modern Indian English

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Poetry. In Dauwalla's poetry, the landscape of Northern Indian hills and plains is evoked in many poems notably. "The Ghaghra in Spate". Shiv K. Kumar's "Indian women", "An Indian Mango Vendor", "Kovalam Beach", "Transcendental Meditation", and "A Hindu to his Cow" are some poems which describe the Indian landscape. Kumar not only makes subtle use of mythology (Subterfuges, p. 15) but he has to his credit some fine portraiture of Indian women:

In this triple baked continent
Women don't etch angry eyebrows
On mud walls.
Patiently they sit
Like empty pitchers
On the mouth of the village well ---

(Subterfuges, p. 37)

The search for 'Self' is a major concern for Indian poets in English. Given the peculiar genesis of Indian English Poetry, it is no wonder that the poet's 'other world'—the 'real' English-speaking world—holds a special attention for him. The poet, reared upon the English Language, longs to be at the centre of English language culture; but he also has his involvement with India, and is thus, torn between two worlds. Poets may settle down in England or America or Germany or for that matter, in any other country, or may decide to remain in India, but their alliance continues to be mixed.
Modern Indian English poets may be divided into three groups: those who have lived for some years particularly during their formative years in the West, and thereafter returned to India; those who have decided to make their home in the West; and those who have never lived abroad for any substantial period. To first group belong Ezekiel, Moraes Jussawala, Parthasarathy and Vikram Seth. G.S. Sharat Chandra and Ramanujan as also Sujata Bhatt belong to the second group, Sharat Chandra and Ramanujan both having settled in America, Sujata Bhatt in Germany, though it is notable that Ramannujan has maintained strong ties with Indian culture and ancient literature. (Parthasarathy has, in recent years, settled himself in America, and may end up in the second group). It is also notable that even Moraes, the most ‘English’ of Indian English poets, who seemed very much at home in the British literary world, chose to return to India. At the present time, there may be some younger poets like H.O. Nazareth living in England, but, significantly, none of the leading Indian English poets lives in England.  

The appeal of ‘Self’ and ‘Exile’ appears to have been particularly strong with poets who began writing in the fifties or early sixties. The consequent ‘self questioning’ and ‘inner-tension’ can be observed in the poems of Ezekiel, Ramanujan, Parthasarathy and Jussawala. A number of leading poets who began to publish during the seventies,

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e.g., Mahapatra, Daruwalla, Kolatkar and Mehrotra—belong to the third group described above, and never seem to have felt much need for living in exile. They seem to regard India as their natural home, and felt no need to make self-conscious resolutions or declarations such as Ezekiel’s oft-quoted one:

I have made my commitments now
This is one; to stay where I am,
As others choose to give themselves
In some remote and backward place.
My backward place is where I am.

("Background, Casually")

R. Parhasarathy visualizing the direction of Indian English Poetry in future, talks of ‘Indian reality’ as the major preoccupation of our poets. Thus, the realities of life and being are stressed with definite accents. This is more pronounced in the poems related to the city-life and almost all major poet discuss it in their poetry. Most of this poetry is about the mundane, the quotidian and the monotony of the routine urban life. Poets frequently perceive the city as a site where the self / other barrier is explored. The self meets other selves in relationships that are antagonistic, supportive, threatening or simply indifferent. There is maladjustment, fear, cruelty that uniformly mark the poetry of the city. It’s the site of chance, sexual encounters, and undemanding, loveless relationships. It is indifferent to its inhabitants and
their emotional attachments, and offers neither comfort, nor shelter.

Mysticism has not found much favour with modern poets and apart from A.K. Mehrotra, Nissim Ezekiel and A.K. Ramanujan as their later poetry shows there are few poets interested in the mystic mode. Similarly Indian myth which was amply displayed in the poetry of Toru Dutt, Aurobindo and Sarojini Naidu, seems to be lacking in the poetry of the modern poets. The attempted rejuvenation of legendary characters by P. Lal and the attempts to mythicize Radha – Krishna legend by Nissim Ezekiel and Kamla Das have not been very successful. Some of the modern poets have even failed to realize the powerful impact of myth. One may like to cite, for instance, the views of Adil Jussawala on Shri Aurobindo’s Savitri: ‘To my mind --- Savitri is a poem on the relation of the spirit to a 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.’

Jussawala questions a tradition which, in his view is nothing but 'a vagueness of thought, an absolute faith in the mystical, and a blind reliance in the heart'. Thus he fails to see the symbolic reliance of the mythological Savitri to the Indian womanhood. Savitri, Sita, Draupadi, Damyanti and Sakuntala,

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remain among others some of the supreme epitomes of holy wedded love in the Indian tradition and some of the greatest examples of noble conceptions of noble minds.

As the corpus of Indian English Poetry is quite enormous, the discussion of its themes can be extended to any dimension, but the above discussion of some of the major themes will surely suffice our purpose to show what actually consists of the content of Indian English Poetry. From this discussion of the 'content' we now move on to make a brief statement on the 'form' of Indian English Poetry.

**Form**

Form is a natural correlate to content. It leads us directly to a consideration of the language of composition, in terms of its images, diction etc. of which the world of poetry is made. They constitute the essential elements of poetry, unravel the poet's area of associations and demonstrate his ability to reach to his reader by making an impression / effect felt. This impression / effect can either be in the form of reason / knowledge or pleasure.

Before we begin this study of the formal features as stated above of Indian English Poetry, we shall like to make some statement on the nature of imagery and diction. Imagery is a topic which belongs both to psychology and literary study. In psychology it means a mental reproduction a memory of
sensational or perceptual experience which may be auditory or may be wholly psychological. In literary study, it refers to pictures produced by language, whose words and statements may refer either to experiences which could produce physical perceptions were the readers actually to have those experience, or to the sense – impressions themselves. In other words, it is used, in literary study, to refer variously to the meaning of a statement involving images, to the images themselves, or to the combination of images and meaning. Thus Longinus says, --- image is used of any mental conception, from whatever source it presents itself which gives rise to speech--- (On the Sublime, 15.2) or Spurgeon says, I use the term image here as the only available word to cover every kind of simile, as well as every kind of what is called compressed simile – 'metaphor' or C.D. Lewis refers to it as a picture made out of words' for 'exploring reality'. These various definitions can be reduced essentially to three (i) 'mental imagery'; (ii) 'imagery as figures of speech', and (iii) 'imagery and image patterns as the embodiment of symbolic vision'.

Our first definition emphasizes the relation of the statement on the page to the sensation it produces in the mind. Interest

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32 C.F.E. Spurgeon, Shakespear’s Imagery and What It Tells us (Cambridge : At the University Press 1935), p. 35.
in this field was apparently first aroused by the early experiments in the psychology of perception of Sir Frances Galton, in 1880 who sought to discover that people differ in their image making habits and capacities.

Our second definition concentrates on the nature of the relationship between a subject and analogue, that is, on metaphor. Although it is the analogue which is, strictly speaking, the image, the term is often used to refer to the entire subject analogue relationship.

Our third definition is concerned precisely with the function of image patterns whether literal or figurative or both, as symbols by virtue of psychological association. The problems here are to ascertain how the poet's choice of imagery reveals not merely the sensory capacities of his mind but also his interests, tastes, temperament values, and vision; to determine the function of recurring images in the poem in which they occur as tone-setters, structural devices and symbols: and to examine the relations between the poet's over-all image patterns and those of myths and rituals.

While discussing the patterns of imagery – whether literal, figurative or both—we are faced with the essential question of how does this pattern of imagery in a work reveals things about the author and or his poem the basic assumption is that repetition and recurrences are in themselves significant.
If we assume for the moment that repetitions are indeed significant, the nature of the significance must be examined. What exactly, will counting image clusters tell the critic? There are at least five distinguishable answers:

1. Texts of doubtful authorship can be authenticated;\(^{34}\)
2. Inferences can be made about the poet’s experiences, tastes, temperament, and so on;\(^{35}\)
3. The causes of tone, atmosphere, and mood in a poem or play can be analysed and defined;\(^{36}\)
4. Some of the ways in which the structure of conflict in a play is supported can be examined;\(^{37}\)
5. Symbols can be traced out, either in terms of how they relate to archetypes, or some combination.\(^{38}\)

The first two approaches relate to problems extrinsic to the work itself, although they seek internal evidence. The procedure involves counting all images in a given work or in all the works of a given poet and then classifying them according to the areas of experience from which they derive:

\(^{34}\) M.D. Smith, *Marlowe’s Imagery and the Marlow Cannon* (Edinburgh: Cadell, 1940), pp. 80-94.
\(^{36}\) C.F.E. Spurgeon, *op. cit.*, pp. 43-56.
Nature – animate and inanimate, daily life, learning, commerce and so on.\textsuperscript{39} Since these categories and their proportions represent aspects of the poet's imagination and perception, we can draw two inferences on the basis of the resultant charts and figures: first, that these patterns are caused by the poet's personal experiences with life and that, therefore, they give a clue to the poet's personality and background;\textsuperscript{40} and second, that since they are unique, they offer a means of determining the authorship of the doubtful texts.

The third and fourth approaches relate to problems intrinsic to the artistic organization of the work itself. 'One cannot long discuss imagery', says Burke, 'without sliding into symbolism. The poet's images are organized with relation to one another by reason of their symbolic kinship. We shift from the image of an object to its symbolism as soon as we consider it, not in itself alone, but as a function in a texture of relationship'.\textsuperscript{41}

The next and fifth approach was to reason once again from inside to outside the work, but this time ostensibly for the sake of returning to it with greater insight. A poem is a dramatic revelation in disguised and symbolic form of the poet's emotional tensions and conflicts, and if therefore some

\textsuperscript{39} C.F.E. Spurgeon, opp. cit., pp. 394-408.
\textsuperscript{40} Ibid., p. 12.
\textsuperscript{41} K. Burke, opp. cit., pp. 68-69.
idea of these tensions and conflicts in his personal life can be formed, the reader will then be driven to their symbolic meaning.

Having discussed imagery at three different levels, we may now be tempted to ask what is involved in each definition, how each is related to the others, what the values of each are. Cognitive psychologists have defined a number of different kinds of mental imagery: visual, auditory, olfactory, gustatory, tactile, organic and kinesthetic. Obviously these categories, although perhaps somewhat over-elaborate for the purposes of literary criticism, are preliminary to the other approaches to imagery, for they define the very nature of the materials. And several valuable results have emerged from the application of these distinctions to literature. Firstly, its concept of mental imagery has catholicity of taste, for once it has been realized that not all poets have the same sorts of sensory capacities, it is easier to appreciate different kinds of poetry. Secondly, the concept of the mental imagery provides a valuable index to the type of imagination with which any poet is gifted. Thirdly, the concept of mental imagery is pedagogically useful in encouraging better reading habits by stressing these aspects of poetry. Thus, because the reader is encouraged to make specific images in his mind as he reads, aesthetic appreciation can be improved in a very literal sense.
As noted earlier, imagery, whatever its sensory qualities may be, may function either literally, figuratively, symbolically or in some combination. Thus an investigation of figurative imagery involves such problems as that of rhetorical types, that of the kinds of relationship which may obtain between subject and analogue, that of the nature of the symbolic expression and that of the use of figures in poetry, which the study of mental imagery has either confused or ignored.

Rhetoricians like Quintilian developed elaborate systems of classification for figures of speech. In our discussion of the sources of the sublime we found how the third source of the elevated style concerned itself with the proper formation of the two types of figure—the figures of thought and figures of speech (On the Sublime, 8, 108). The common types distinguished now, however, have been reduced to about six: metaphor, synecdoche, metonymy, simile, personification, allegory, and a related but different device symbol.42 Each of these figures is a device of language by means of which one thing is said (analogue), while something else is meant (subject), and either the subject or the analogue, or both, may involve imagery. Thus the term imagery is commonly used to refer to all figures of speech.

Modern criticism has developed what it views as a radically functional theory of imagery. It is based on the assumption

42 Alex Preminger, opp. cit., 365.
that figures are the differential of the poetic art. Its favourable terms are 'rich', 'complex', 'concrete', 'ambiguous', 'ironic', 'symbolic', 'mystic', 'sensuous', 'unified', 'wholeness', and so on, while its decoratives are 'sentimental', 'prosaic', 'didactic', 'disassociated' and so on.\textsuperscript{43}

Having discussed the nature of imagery it may now be asked what is the function of imagery. Imagery may be, in the first place, the speaker's subject, what he is talking about, whether present before him or recalled to mind afterwards. This includes roughly speaking, people, places, objects, actions and events. Since economy is a fundamental artistic principle, it may be said that usually literal imagery is converted into a pseudo-subject, becoming the symbol of something else as a result of the speaker's reflective and meditative activity. Mere scenery is rarely enough in itself except in descriptive poems, to justify its presence in a poem. Thirdly and lastly, images may function as analogies brought into the poem from outside the world of the speaker, apart from his literal subject to function in a purely figurative fashion.

It may be asked, finally, what the poet gains by the use of such devices. Imagery, especially of the figurative or symbolic sort, may be in the first place, serve as a device for explaining, clarifying and making vivid what the speaker, is

\textsuperscript{43} Ibid. p. 367.
talking about. Secondly, and correspondingly, the terms in which he is making that response serve to reveal implicitly the mood of the speaker. Thirdly and consequently, it stimulates and externalizes his mental activity. Fourthly, the poet's handling of imagery, through his selection of detail and choice of comparisons, serves to dispose the reader either favourably or unfavourably toward the various elements in the poetic situation. Fifthly, imagery may serve as a way of arousing and guiding the reader's expectations.

Having noted these observations on imagery, we may now turn to the other aspect of this discussion, i.e., to the aspect of diction after which we shall make the study of form in terms of imagery and diction of Indian English Poetry.

Although the term diction or specifically poetic diction assumed importance in the 19th century with Wordsworth's Preface to Lyrical Ballads (2nd ed. 1800) we find its first discussion in Aristotle: 'The clearest diction is that which consists of words in everyday use, but this is commonplace, --on the other hand, a diction abounding in unfamiliar usages has dignity, and is raised above the everyday level' (On the Art of Poetry, 22,62). Longinus, we have already seen, favours the choice of appropriate and high sounding words which moves and enchants the audience and reminds us that such choice is always the highest aims of all orators and authors (On the Sublime, 30,139). It is this choice that
imparts to style grandeur, beauty, mellowness, weight, force and power. Advising against the use of grand diction all the time, especially in the use of trifling matters, he favours and recommends the use of homely terms which is sometimes much more expressive than elegant diction. It is taken from everyday life, is at once recognised and carries more conviction from its familiarity. Wordworth's Preface, his attack on false diction and Coleridge's vindication of true poetic diction, laid down the principles and prepared the way for much valuable criticism in the 19th and 20th century on the question of diction in poetry. We are, however, not going into the intricacies of the issue because it may tend to deviate us from our main concern which is to study the form of Indian English Poetry in terms of its imagery and diction.

Indian English poets have derived their images from various sources. The main body of the images falls into two groups—the abstract and concrete. The category of ‘abstract’ includes images from life, death, light, darkness, day, night, colour, dreams visions, etc. The ‘concrete’ is divided into animate and inanimate which are further subdivided into human and non-human and natural and artificial respectively. Between animate and inanimate we have a vast body of images, for example, images from adult life and childhood, images from animal and vegetable life, images from nature

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and images from house, door, window, etc. Thus the main division of images, that is, the grouping of the images under concrete and then, further, the subdivision of concrete into human and non-human and then again into natural and artificial can well be illustrated by the following diagram.45

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All phenomenon
   / \                     / \                     / \
 /   \                   /   \                   /   \
Abstract   Concrete      Animate   Inanimate
   / \                     /   \                     /   \
   /     \                   /     \                   /     \
   /       \                 /       \                 /       \
   Human   Non-human       Natural   Artificial
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Now we shall proceed to our study of the language of Indian English Poetry. One may again begin with Toru Dutt, the first major poet, and her poem, "Our Casuarina Tree", the first major poem. Thus starting with the formal feature, the figures, we notice that the structure of the poem is based on the art of weaving image upon image. Thus in the first stanza we notice how the poet opens this poem with the simile of a 'huge Python' likened to a 'creeper', that goes 'winding round and round' the 'rugged trunk indented deep with scars' and

45 The diagram is slightly modified from the one given in Derek Dickerton 'Prolegomena to a Linguistic Theory of Metaphor', (ed.), M.K. Ching, opp. cit., p. 53.
which holds 'crimson flowers', and in 'whose embraces bound
/ no other tree could live':

Like a huge python, winding round and round
The rugged trunk, indented with deep scars
Up to the very summit near the stars.
A Creeper climbs, in whose embraces bound
No other tree could ever live.

Instead of simply starting the poem with the statement that
the tree is 'huge, tall, strong and charming' the idea is
conveyed in the most tasteful manner by building with the
basic simile, the figures—the poetical fancy, the vicarious
reference, the metaphor and the exaggeration. This
excellence of the poet consists in the art of contrast. Moving
to the second stanza, we shall see that through the
employment of the figure of condensed expression, the poet
brings up the image of winter and then the images of natural
things that are active in this season. The illuminating quality
is found in the comparison, 'statue like', 'like snow-
enmassed', and 'alone'. Against these images of 'stillness'
the poet draws up a series of images that co-exist with the
spring season thereby creating contrast. The illuminating
quality is here found in the verb spring as in 'off spring';
water lilies spring,' and then in 'sunrise', 'leap about and
play' as well as 'kokilas hail the day'. In the third stanza we
notice a series of images drawn up to convey the idea of
pathos. Hence the images of 'hot tears', 'dirge like murmur',
'sea breaking', 'tree's lament' and eerie speech. In the fourth stanza the poet faced with the desire to see the light of truth, weaves image over image which convey the idea of peace. Hence the images of 'sheltered', 'gently kissed', 'tranced', dreamless swoon', 'music' etc. come up. Here we may also notice the perspicuous beauty arising out of the figure of exaggeration. The main role of this figure is to make things appear in their transcendent dimension. The fifth stanza holds up aesthetically the union in opposition of the personal creation and the impersonal ideal which the poem signifies. A number of contrast is to be noted in the poem. Thus the choice of words reveals a unique art in the blending of apparently dissimilar objects and ideas. In this context we may notice the use of paradoxical images 'light' and 'darkness' 'scarf' and flowers, 'far' and 'near', 'spring' and 'winter', 'sea-breaking' against 'sheltered-bay' etc. Thus the structure reveals itself in the balance and reconciliation of like and desperate images. It hence reflects the typical romantic conflict of emotional desires and material realities being resolved by a subtle integration of images, based on both senses and sound.

We also notice artistic turn in sound in accordance with the underlying motives of emotion. Hence the alliterative art is seen to work in union with meter and rhyme to serve the cause of excellence as well as style in promoting emotion. The aesthetic experience is successfully brought about by the
style reflected in the words and their meaning. Thus the
success of the poem lies in the fact that it is wrought with
fine artistry, with an end to enrich the experience of the
reader through delighting.

We shall now cite a few examples from other poems of Toru
Dutt to show the zest behind the amazingly original and vivid
imagery of her poems. Notice the vigour and force with which
she writes the following lines:

   The fireflies gemmed the bushes all,
   Like fiery drops of rain.    ("Sindhu", p. 170.)

Or the robustness with which she conceives the following line

   The curse of blood is on thee now.
   Blood calls for red blood still. ("Sindhu", p. 172)

Or the daring literal translation of an Indian folk saying, to
evoke the poignancy of mother's hearts yearning for the
safety of her son, in the following lines:

   Who do my bowels for him yearn,
   What ill has crossed his path? ("Sindhu", p. 174.)

Further the sweep and melody of her limes is noticeable in
the following lines:

   Once and once only, all submit
   To Destiny, - 'its Gods' command;
   Once and once only, so 'its writ',
   Shall woman pledge her faith and hand;
Once and once only, can a sire
Unto his well-loved daughter say,
In presence of the witness fire
I give thee to this man away
Once and once only, have given
My heart and faith 'its past recall'

("Savitri", p. 118)

Past all the houses, past the wall,
Past gardens gay, and hedgerows trim,
Past fields, whose sinuous booklets small
With molten selver to the brim. ("Savitri" p. 119)

One can add, if one wishes, a long list of beautiful and
illustrative examples in addition to those listed above to show
the musical quality and the skill of the poet in weaving
wonderful images. But that is not our purpose here.

Aurobindo's language, on the other hand, tends to evoke
grandeur. This is amply evident in the numerous poems he
wrote. Apart from the epic poems which always express the
stateliness of thought and expression, this trait of
Aurobindo's poetry is evident in his small poems as well, in
the sonnets for which he had a particular fascination. Thus,
of the numerous sonnets Aurobindo wrote, one may take
"Shiva" to show how the choice of words etc. tend to evoke
grandeur. This is how the sonnet opens:

One the white summit of eternity
A single soul of bare infinities,
Guarded he keeps a fire screen of peace
His mystic loneliness of nude ecstasy.

The image that is created in the above lines has both power and pure environment. The poet's pictorial description and presentation of Lord Shiva is achieved through the choice of his words and phrases 'white summit of eternity', 'single soul', 'bare infinities', 'fire screen of peace', 'mystic loneliness' and 'nude ecstasy'. These words evoke the image of Lord Shiva as he is seen. Again, in the next lines, the same choice of powerful words and elegant diction is observed:

But touched by an immense delight to be,
He looks across unending depths and sees
Musing amidst the inconscient silences
The mighty Mother's dumb felicity.

Again words and phrases like 'immense delight'; 'unending depths' 'inconscient silences' and 'dumb felicity' have the power to sweep the reader off his feet. The whole poem is full of words which carry a sense of deep power and impression. Thus in the remaining six lines of the poem:

Half now awake he rises to his glance;
Then, moved to circling by her heart beats will,
The rhythmic worlds describe that passion – dance
Life springs to her and Mind is born; her face
She lifts to Him who is herself, until
the spirit leaps into the spirit's embrace.

We find how the 'Divine awakening' is reached. Again words
and phrases as powerful as 'Half now awake', 'passion
dance' and the sentence 'Life springs to her and Mind is
born' carry the true Aurobindonean stamp which is to be
noted again and again. Notice the music and sweep, the
rhythm and unity in such lines from 'The Tiger and The Deer':

Brilliant crouching, slouching, what crept through
the green heart of the forest
Gleaning eyes and mighty chest and soft soundless
Paws of grandeur and murder?

Where else can we find such grandeur and sweep? The very
words, 'brilliant', 'crouching', 'slouching', 'gleaning eyes',
mighty chest and soft soundless paws of grandeur and
murder reveal the grandeur of the tiger. The poet almost uses
the inevitable word to manifest his ideas, as K.R. Srinivas
Iyengar says: 'In his poetry everything hinges on the word'.
Notice the description of the forest and the tiger in the next
lines:

The wind slipped through the leaves as if afraid less
Its voice and the
Noise of its steps perturb the pitiless splendour
Hardly daring.
The image of the wind slipping its leaves, its being afraid of its own voice and the noise of its steps is truly remarkable for its description. So is the phrase 'pitiless splendour'. The moment of the final decision of the tiger to pounce on the deer is again terrific and picturesque:

But the great beast crouched and crept, and
Crept and crouched a last time, noiseless, fatal,
All suddenly death leaped on the beautiful wild dear as it drank
Unsuspecting from the great pool in the forest's coolness and shadow,
And it fell, died remembering its mate left sole in the deep woodland
Destroyed, the mild harmless beauty by strong cruel beauty in Nature.

Everything of the whole situation is brought before our eyes. The expressions are most suggestive and to the point. The most pathetic scene is brought out in the words; 'died remembering its mate left sole in the deep woodland'. The repetition in the words 'crouched and crept, and crept and crouched' is musical and suggests the restlessness of the tiger.

The above cited lines from the two poems of Sri Aurobindo are enough to show the mastery and forcefulness of the language of Sri Aurobindo. In the preceding pages of this
chapter we have already cited a number of sentences and passages of various hues and colours which carry the stamp of Sri Aurobindo. One can especially refer to the passage describing the divine love of Urvasie and Pururavus. The poet using a number of figurative expressions such as similes etc as in 'like a mishandled lily', 'as a fallen moon', 'like a slim tree', 'as two shipwrecked in a surge' evokes a picture of holy love which remains in our mind for ever. The passage is truly remarkable for its beautiful and grand evocation of love. The words and phrases such as 'Divinely lifting', 'A warm rich splendour exquisitely outlined / Against the dazzling whiteness', 'a sea of mighty joy', 'wonderful hair loosened', 'glorious mouth of heaven's desire' come like hammer strokes in true Longinian spirit. These and the one cited from Savitri are just a few examples to show the enormous range and variety of the lexis of Sri Aurobindo but these are sufficient to show the grandeur of his thought as well as his diction.

P. Lal's observation on Sri Aurobindo's diction, 'The entire game is reminiscent of Roget's Thesaurus, where redundant familiars like 'soul', 'spiritual, 'subtle', 'deeps', and 'death less' enjoy a private tea - party' (Modern Indo Anglian Poetry, p. II) does not sound valid. Even a cursory glance at the vocabulary of Savitri will show that the choice of words here is one of the most comprehensive and varied and one of the great achievements of Indian English Poetry. Aurobindo created in Savitri a great epic diction which is commensurate
with the lordliness of the theme. The lexis is not restricted to 'poetic' words alone. There is daring used of particular words related with particular field. Sri Aurobindo went on changing his strategy according to the changing subject matter and used great variety of diction to reach great heights.

Notice how Sri Aurobindo uses concrete terminology borrowed from the sciences:

The tree of evolution I have sketched,  
Each branch and twig and leaf in its own place  
In the embryo tracked the history of forms,  
And the genealogy framed of all that lives.  
I have detected plasm and cell and gene,  
The protozoa traced, men's ancestors,  
The humble original from whom he rose.  

(Savitri, p. 158)

The passage shows Sri Aurobindo's great capacity to use unusual words. Notice again, Sri Aurobinod's use of scholarly words. In the following passage he uses technical terms to describe the archangels that try to know the truth from within:

Imposing schemes of knowledge on the vast  
They clamped to syllogisms of finite thought  
The free logic of an infinite consciousness,  
Grammared the hidden rhythms of Nature's dance,  
Critiqued the plot of drama of the world,  
Made figure and number a key to all that is.
The psycho-analysis of cosmic self
Was traced, its secret hunted down and read.
The unknown pathology of the unique. (*Savitri*, p 245)

The reference to syllogism, logic, grammar and psycho-analysis shows how different words can be used in live contexts.

The impression of what P. Lal calls the vague 'luminosity' of form is, therefore, not justified. There is a remarkable evidence of imaginative as well as emotional precision in the diction of *Savitri* which is not to be found anywhere else in the entire corpus of Indian English Poetry. So far as the poetic words are concerned, such as eternity, change, lean, wrap, fated journeying, star, spaces, waking, limitless, scattered, sealed, depths, luminous, fire, silence, consecration, vibrant, fail, altar, hill, wind, pray, revealing etc, we find a romantically significant use of adjectives as in 'fated journeyings', 'limitless eye' and 'revealing eye'. There is the Keatsian use of double adjectives which are not separated even by a comma: 'a great priestly wind'. 'wide-winged' in 'wide-winged hymn' is a compound word coined by Sri Aurobindo and most will agree that it qualifies 'wind' with marvellous propriety. 'Altar hills' is a collocation modelled after the manner of Keats and other Romantics who themselves took it over from the Elizabethans. Sri Aurobindo is very fond of such combinations of substantives and they are to be found in profusion in *Savitri*. 
Finally, the literary allusiveness in the lexis of Sri Aurobindo. Eliot has shown to us how quotations from other poets can be fitted into new contexts in a manner which endows them with the novelty that distinguishes original writing itself. Sri Aurobindo does not quote. But he has oblique and indirect references to famous phrases and lines of poetry which come like hammer strokes, uplift the soul and show that this can result in great poetry.

Now coming to the language of Sarojini Naidu, one notices that there is a luxuriousness of imagery and an abundance of figures. The colourfulness of her metaphors is evident in her early poems which 'are a little too buoyant and optimistic'---'over exuberant in spirit and wordy almost to the point of tiresomness; they are more effervescent than full of substance. It is perhaps this wealth of words and dearth of matter that the answer in The Broken wing is not an answer at all to the question that has been asked: 'Why does thou bear a broken wing?' The why is answered with an evasive 'nevertheless', and the lack of logic and relevance is covered up by loud talk of a far-reaching throat, an unconquered heart and a dauntless spirit that can scale the stars even on a broken wing. The diction too is elaborately remote and romantic: the air is a little too full of 'poetic' butterflies like
'bough' and 'morn' and 'ape' and 'realms', it even holds such a rare moth as 'mine ancient world'\textsuperscript{46}

The string of images follow in the later poems also. Pathetic Fallacy and metaphors again abound. Thus, in a number of poems we find these figures used skillfully. A beautiful example of the figure of Pathetic fallacy is the poem "The Song of Princess Zebun Nissa". Thus, Roses when they look at the unmatchable beauty of the princess, turn pale with envy and 'from their pierced hearts, rich with pain, send forth their fragrance like a wail', her perfumed tresses outdo 'the honeyed hyacinths'. Examples of metaphor are found in many poems. Thus, in "The Snake Charmer", the snake is the subtle bride of the charmer's mellifluous wooing; in "Bangle – Sellers" the bangles are the bright rainbow tinted circles of light, in "Praise of Gulmohar Blossoms", the lovely hue of the gulmohars is the glimmering red of bridal robe, and the rich red of wild bird's wing; in 'Golden Casia', the golden Cassias are the fragments of some new fallen star or the golden lamps for a fairy shrine, or the golden pitchers for fairy wine, or the bright anklet bells from the wild spring's feet, or the glimmering ghosts of a bygone dream; in "A Rajput Love Song", the day is a wild stallion, and the beloved wishes her lover to be a basil – wreath to twine among her tresses, a jewelled clasp of shining gold to bind around her sleeve, the Keora's soul that haunts her silken raiment, a bright

\textsuperscript{46} Dustoor, opp. cit., p. 15.
vermilion tassel in the girls that she weaves, the scented fan that lines upon her pillow, a sandal lute, or silver lamps that burn before her.

We shall like to cite a few examples to show her vivid imagery:

The wind lies asleep in the arms of the dawn
Like a child that has cried all night.

("Coromandal Fishers")

Like a joy on the heart of a sorrow
The sunset hangs on a cloud. ("Autumn Song")

A parrot – plumes outshine the dying day. ("Leili")

And exquisite, subtle and slow are the tinkle and Tread of their rhythmical, slumber – soft feet.

("Indian Dancer")

Ere the quick night upon her flock descends Like a black panther from the caves of sleep.

("The Indian Gypsy")

Time lifts the curtain unawares And sorrow looks into her face. ("The Purdah Nashin")

Death is in truth the vital seed Of your imperishable bloom.

("The Royal Tomb of Golconda")
and lastly

A caste mark on the azure brows of Heaven,
The golden moon burns sacred, solemn bright.

("Leili")

J.H. Cumin's remarks on the image of the moon as caste mark on the brow of Heaven are worth quoting: It 'lifts India to the literary heavens; it releases Luna from the asylum-keeper and gives her instead the office of the remembrance that the Divine is imprinted on the open face of Nature'.

From this brief analysis of the language of Sarojini Naidu we notice that the ideals which she seeks to portray is that of aesthetic experience of beauty. In her the 'beautiful' is made aesthetic through sensuous descriptions of movements and physical forms. Seasonal changes in nature and bodily signs of inner feeling are coloured richly to create a dense atmosphere of passion. The endless intoxication at the touch of beauty reveals a spontaneous understanding and acceptance of the Indian point of view on the question of man's relationship with nature. According to this view man and nature are seen to enrich and complete each other. There is a common stream of life, a rhythmic power, which animates both nature and man. Sarojini Naidu portrays this harmony between nature and man in her poetry. Hence the

Quoted in A.F. Dustoor, opp. cit., p. 20.
figures that she employs, the simile, the metaphors etc. are all based on the principle of analogy.

Now, coming to the language of the modern poets, their use of images and their choice of words, one feels that there lies a particular fascination and obsession with the images of human anatomy revealing extreme sensuality and sexuality. We shall focus on this aspect of the language of the modern poets to show whether there is something noble and elegant in the choice of imagery and the use of words. In the hands of modern poets, body becomes the overall apparatus and touch the lens bringing the body into focus. This is repeated in poets after poets where we shall find an excess of sexual imagery. A few illustrations from different poets will support our point. Here is what Nissim Ezekiel, one of the pioneers of modern English poetry, has to offer:

A feeling for the mystery
of man and woman joined, exhaustion
At the act, desire for it again. ("To a Certain Lady")

Notice the choice of words and the use of lines, 'breasts like roses', 'breasts and buttocks as fruits', 'thighs as tree trunks', 'unconfined threshing thighs', 'threshing thighs and breasts', 'the threshing thighs and the singing breasts / exhausted by the act, desiring it again', 'his thighs as though they were not part of him', 'small breasts', 'big breasts' 'breasts and buttocks', 'your breasts are small, / tender / like
your feelings', 'lips and thighs', 'she / let me touch her breasts', 'her breasts and thighs are beautiful', 'orgasm' and 'frigidity', 'whore of love', 'great woman beast of sex', 'the eyes are large / so are the breasts', 'your thighs are full and round, / thin and flat l'd love them too' which find numerous expressions in the poetry of Nissim Ezekiel.48

Thus poems like "Situation", "Lines", "Marriage Poems", "Tribute", "For Her", "Question", "Report", "A Short Stay", "Two Nights of Love", "Old Abyss" are poems under the category of poems of body. The poet is always found to be watching 'your midriffs moist and your thighs unruly, / Breasts beneath the fabric slyly popping' for instance, in 'At the Party'49 or he is eager to see 'the naked Cuban dancer' shaking her breasts and dropping 'the thin transparent skirt she wore', for example, in 'At the Hotel'.50

The common human urge for sexual pleasure is found to be very dominant and the poet believes that in the modern world man-woman relationship relies too much on the sexual aspect. Therefore, the description of submission to the indiscreet sexual urges in the 'body poems' of Ezekiel. The poet believes 'That woman, trees, tables, waves and birds, / Buildings, stones, steamrollers / cats and clocks / Are here to be enjoyed'. The very thought of the poet to view woman as a

48 Nissim Ezekiel, opp. cit., Examples have been taken from different poems scattered in the collection.
49 Ibid. opp. cit., p. 98.
50 Ibid. opp. cit., p. 112.
sex object, as a thing to be enjoyed and put her simultaneously with, buildings, stones, steamrollers, cats and clocks etc is shorn of any compassion and noble emotions. Notice again, how he views in 'A Woman Observed' all that sensual movement bursting through the dress' or sees Radha – Krishna myth from a different angle: Krishna's tricks / are not for him / nor Ratha's wiles / for her / They have a different truth / within a kingdom of their own'. Notice, again the lust and the hunger displayed in the lines:

Don't she says don't
convincing all the same
short of tearing her clothes
he's using all his force
soon he's had what he wanted
soft, warm and round.52 ("Hymns in Darkness")

Thus 'breasts, thighs, buttocks / swinging / now towards him / now away from him' seem to obsess the poet's mind'.53 Naturally V.K. Gokak, singled out Ezekiel's poetry for not being rooted in Indian culture, and for lacking depth of thought (Times of India, 15 August 1991).

The same is taken to a new height in Kamla Das. The realistic image of the lustful relationship between man and woman is presented in a choice of words that is shocking.

51 Ibid. opp. cit., p. 215.
52 Ibid. opp. cit., p. 221.
53 Ibid. opp. cit., p. 220.
The images drawn from the human body are used most frequently to show the unending, grand flamboyant lust. The poet is conscious of the beauty and glory of the human anatomy and is always attracted by it. Therefore the images of standing 'nude before the glass', 'the perfection of limbs', the 'eyes reddening under the shower', 'the shy walk across the bathroom floor', 'dropping towels', 'the jerky way he urinates', 'the scent of long hair', 'the musk of sweat between the breasts', 'the warm shock of menstrual blood', 'the endless female hunger's ("The Looking Glass")\textsuperscript{54}, the 'burning mouth', the 'long braids flying', and the 'dark eyes flashing', 'my body's response, its weather, its usual shallow convulsions'.

Notice the use of images and the choice of words in the following lines:

Gift him all,
Gift him what makes you woman, the scent of long hair, the musk of sweet between the breasts, The warm shock of menstrual blood and all your Endless female hungers. ("The Looking Glass")

and

You are pleased with my body's response, its weather, its usual shallow

\textsuperscript{54} R. Parhasarathy. opp. cit., p. 27.
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

("The Old Play House")

This obsession with the images of human anatomy and
physical features is found in numerous poets. Notice, for
instance, in R. Parthasarathy, 'All night your hand has rested
/ on her left breast ("Exile1"), in Jayant Mahapatra, 'big
breasted hard eyed young whore' ("Lost Children of
America"), 'she opened her wormy legs wide ("Hunger", The
Rain of Rites, 1976) etc. There is a recurring portrait of
women in Mahapatra and sexual love, the encounters
between men and women is described in all their immense
varieties. 'The flesh' is always 'heavy on my back', says the
poet. 'Hunger' and 'The Whorehouse in Calcutta' are two of
his poems that describe this. Notice K. N. Daruwalla's choice
of images, also Shiv K. Kumar's and A.K. Mehrotra's. This is
what Daruwalla writes : 'in India / the left hand is out caste /
because it cleans the arse' (Under Orion, p. 53). This is Shiv
K. Kumar, 'Does Krishna, your servant / still clean his arse
with milk / before filling up the can / with rain water'
(Subterfuges, p. 17). Notice again, Shiv K. Kumar's choice of
words and images in "Kovalam Beach", the vaginal creaks /
lie open – thighed / in insatiable expectancy / while the sea's
thrusts / break into surf / then recede / consummation
thwarted / each time they miss an ovary' (Cobwebs in the Sun, p. 48) or the image of 'pissing' and 'baloon' again, in Shiv K. Kumar:

Enroute to perdition
I stop at grand central to p1ss.
where else can one ease one's nerves
to feel Buddha's peace
when the bladder fills up
like a child's baloon (Subterfuges, p.18)

or the image of 'linga' and 'masturbation' in

I'm everywhere because I feel everything
because I feel god's pulse
in the slut's womb
because my heart has the shape of a linga
because the Traveller's companions
bind me into a unity
better than the Ramayana
because when i masturbate
the universe throbs and continents clap.

("bharatmata : a prayer")

Notice also the contextual use of Buddha's name. The Ramayana, the holiest of the scriptures, is not even spared. Can such compositions be called poetry at all? Not in content, nor in language do they bring any edifying effects on the mind of readers which is the chief aim of poetry. The
images and the choice of words are of the most absurd, grotesque, weird and vulgar type.

If one makes a careful analysis of the images and choice of words, one will find a whole range of sexual machinery working in modern Indian English poetry, but those cited above are enough to show and support our contention that it lacks noble sallies of imagination, grand conceptions and powerful emotions, all essential ingredients of the sublime. We are not making any study of the language of the poets writing in the late 80's and 90's as it has already been stated that in 'rare cases the poetry of these poets touches and scorches'. 55