THE ENGLISH CONCEPTION OF POETRY AT WORK: NEW APPROACH,
THEMES AND REPRESENTATION

If the first intimation of modern Gujarati poetry written under the
impact of English is found in Dalpatram, its first clear evidence is found in
Narmad, who unlike Dalpatram, was largely a product of the English education
and who had directly come under the spell of English poetry and some literary
criticism. Narmad had had not only the benefit of English education in his
school and college career, but also enough mastery over the English language
to write some prose and even a few verses in English. He seems to have read
more than his text-books of English poetry and it may be stated on his own
authority that he was all attention when English poetry, which included Wordsworth’s,
was taught in his class-room by one of his English Professors, who generally
happened to be Englishmen in his days. His essay on "Poets and Poetry",
written when he was twenty-five, reveals not only his acquaintance with English
literary criticism, but also the fact that his views on poetry were, in a large
measure, moulded by what he had read in English poetry and criticism. What,
therefore, distinguishes Narmad from Dalpatram is his consciousness of what he was
doing and his determination to give a new direction to Gujarati poetry, with the
English Muse as a model before his eyes. Narmad held before his contemporaries a
new concept of poetry and new standards for its evaluation. In his poem on the

3. Vide, his verses on the 'Prince of Wales' Visit to India', 'Narma Kavita', pp.815-
Making of Poetry, Narmad emphasized the importance of writing poetry spontaneously and at once according to the passion of the moment, of the minuteness of observation which lent picturesqueness to it, and of the need for rhythm but not of the song-element in it. In a word, anything that was not artificially or wilfully induced but came as a spontaneous and passionate outburst was, according to Narmad, true poetry. This was a new conception of poetry presented by Narmad to his age. Again, his observation in the same poem that musical tunes should be ruled out of poetry was something like a heresy, since generally Gujarati poetry, by tradition and convention, was meant to be loudly sung or chanted.

Gujarati poetry by the middle of the nineteenth century was passing through its transitional stage. It was a period of twilight, where the old and the new were locked in an interesting struggle. There is much that is old in Narmad, as there is much that is new in Dalpatram, both being, in varying proportions interesting amalgams of the old and the new. Narmad began in the traditional style and produced verses, which occupy a quarter of the space in his volume of about 800 pages. Again, like Dalpatram, he wrote on topical and social problems, which occupy another quarter in his volume. But the remaining half marks him out at once from his contemporaries and predecessors and justifies his claim as the great pioneer of modern Gujarati poetry. Narmad had a more conscious will than Dalpatram to direct his poetic energy into a new channel, and his English education, together with his first-hand acquaintance with English poetry and criticism, gave him a sense of direction in which he was to move. With Narmad burst the dawn of modern Gujarati poetry, with him began a new era of poetry in Gujarat, which bore a distinct stamp of the influence of English on it. Unfortunately, Narmad was a poor illustration of what he preached in his poetic theory. His egotism and

impulsive nature saw in his passionate outbursts in verse the fulfillment of a poet's mission, with the result that what he wrote stamps him rather as a 'bard of passion' than as always a true poet. Most of the poems of Narmad are not works of art, yet his shortcomings, which are serious and many, do not detract from his greatness as a pioneer.

Though Narmad wrote much prose, he liked to think of himself principally as a poet. In 1858, when barely twenty-five, Narmad withdrew himself from all gainful employment and resolved to dedicate himself to his pen with utter indifference to the financial implications of such a step. It was a symbolic act, which betokened that poetry in Gujarat was released from the patronage of the court and princes and from the enlightened beggar's role seeking alms from the religious-minded, to depend only on the willing patronage of the reading public.

Young Narmad, who had studied in an English school at Bombay, joined the Collegiate section of the Elphinstone Institute at the age of seventeen, but domestic responsibilities of an early married life interrupted his studies very soon. He lost his wife in 1853. Later, his mind, as he stated, was torn between his dreams of acquiring fame through learning and thoughts of women. In 1855, he rejoined his College, dreamt of going to England and wasted his time. In this period of mental restlessness, he chanced upon a couple of devotional poems of the medieval Gujarati poet Dhirā, which fell in with his mood and inspired him to write some poetry on his own. He discovered to his great delight and relief that making of poetry had a stabilizing effect upon his restless mind and he resolved to persevere in that art. The young poet believed that he had found in

poetry a panacea, which not only relieved him, but also kept him constantly happy. The verses which he wrote subsequently fell into the traditional mould of devotional or didactic padas (about two hundred in number) but here, even though the subjects as well as their representation were old, Narmad brought to bear upon them his own individual style, so that the man who wrote them stood revealed through what he wrote. In other words, Narmad's personal note was heard in what was otherwise an impersonal business, as for instance, in his 'What a plight is mine!' and 'grieve not, my friends, over my death.' His didactic poem 'Anubhavalahari' is in the vein of the seventeenth century poet Akha, but his 'A Few Thoughts stop the Narma Hill', stands out from the rest by its distinctly personal and new approach, reminiscent of Wordsworth writing in relation to similar objects in Nature.

Narmad also wrote some narrative poems (for instance, 'Rukminiharan', 'Vajesang ne Chandha' and 'Adbhut Yuddha') of the traditional objective type, but Narmad was a poor story-teller and his moralizing was generally of the tritest. In rivalry with Dalpatram, Narmad sought to catch the public ear with a number of poems on topical and social problems. Again, like Dalpatram, Narmad wrote a few loyalist verses on Queen Victoria and the death of Prince Albert. The only bright exception to his lack of poetic success in social verses is his 'Picture of Widowhood', which created quite a stir at the time of its publication. Though Narmad criticized Dalpatram as one 'who revelled in rhymes', in his own poetry, those revels are not ended.

It is not on these things, however, that Narmad's distinctive position in the history of modern Gujarati poetry rests. It is rather with his poetry of the characteristically English complexion, where he broke away from the traditional Gujarati poetry, that he made his mark. Even here, his craftsmanship leaves much to be desired, while his versification would not always bear too close a scrutiny. But as a pioneer of a new type of poetry in Gujarat, he is accorded universal recognition. Narmad was the first to introduce the distinctly English conception of subjectivity in Gujarati poetry. He described his own emotions in his own person directly without a mask or without fathering his emotions on any of his characters. Dalpatram also wrote some subjective poetry, where he made his personal emotions the theme of his compositions. Some of the mediaeval Gujarati poets like Narasimb, Mira and Akha also wrote some fine subjective poetry. But what distinguished Narmad from these, as he himself put it, was his earnest endeavour to depict only what he felt personally and powerfully at that particular moment. This invested at a stroke his poetry with spontaneity, subjectivity and intensity. His apparatus, equipment and judgment were, however, not equal to his ideal and hence his actual performance was often crude, shallow and inartistic. Too much in love with himself and his ideas, very impatient to collect his emotions rather than recollecting them in tranquility, he rarely gave a second thought to what he put on paper. Consequently, there is much in his verse that could have been more properly put in prose, for which the responsibility rests in parts, with himself and his age, which seemed traditionally to believe that anything could be put in verse. There was some justification for doing so in the past, as Gujarati language had no prose worth the name. But Narmad was a writer of both prose and

verse and probably a better prose-writer than a poet. This lack of discrimination was probably due to his general lack of artistic insight and his over-emphasis on, as also his imperfect understanding of, the role of passion or 'josso' in poetry.

Narmad's critical essay on "Poets and Poetry" bears ample evidence of his having read some English literary criticism. From the English critics, particularly Hazlitt, he acquired his new definition of poetry as the expression of passion and imagination. Criticizing the old school of Gujarati poetry, which took some old familiar subjects and put them in easy superficial sing-song style, Narmad declared that it was not true poetry. This, in effect, amounted to Narmad's making an unorthodox statement that poetry need not have old familiar subjects, that its easy appeal to the masses could not be taken as an evidence of its intrinsic quality and that poetry need not be loudly sung or chanted. In the context of the close relation between earlier Gujarati poetry and music, principally because of its oral tradition, Narmad's hint that poetry and music were not always inalienable was startling in its vision and boldness, though not so startling to those familiar with the evolution of English poetry. Narmad maintained that what distinguished a poet from the generality of men was his emotional response or reaction to what he felt and observed and his capacity to render his experiences effectively. He added that since all men were not poets, poetry presumed a certain native talent, which need also a suitable opportunity for its manifestation, without which it died like 'many a flower born to blush unseen and waste its sweetness on the desert air'.

After quoting and translating the above from Gray's "Elegy" Narmad goes close to

the English conception of poetry when he names the indispensable ingredients of
successful poetic activity. Imagination, as he put it, was the mother of poetry.
Probably, Narmad had, besides Hazlitt's, also Shelley's definition of poetry as
"the expression of the imagination"\(^1\) at the back of his mind. Narmad significantly
added that though imagination was the mother of poetry, a certain amount of
critical faculty or what Shelley called 'reason' helped it like a nurse, even
though it had not a major role to play in making of poetry.\(^2\) Further, a poet
was not like an Aeolian harp, vibrating passively at the touch of a passing breeze.
A poet, on the contrary, responded to an external stimulus only to activate his
inner self.\(^3\) A successful poet was, therefore, one whose poetry was a vivid
picture of his self. Narmad remarked that there was a poetry in colour, sound,
form and the rhythmic movement in the art of a painter, musician, sculptor and
dancer and that language was but one of the media of its expression.\(^4\) He also
maintained that there could be poetry in prose\(^5\) - a familiar notion in English
literary criticism. Probably Narmad's basis for this observation may be found
in Hazlitt, who stated that the "Pilgrim's Progress", "Robinson Crusoe" and the
tales of Boccaccio "come as near to poetry as possible without being so".\(^6\) Further,
when Narmad observed that a poet did not merely present things as they were, but
also threw certain colouring of the imagination on them whereby ordinary things were
presented to the mind in an unusual aspect,\(^7\) it is not difficult to trace the
source of his observation to Wordsworth.\(^8\) Referring specifically to Hazlitt by

3. Vide, Ibid, p. 1291
19th Century, p.4.
Narmad observed that poetry was the language of the imagination and the passions. The close resemblance between Narmad’s views on poetry and its constituents and those of the English romantic critics is too obvious to need comment. Thus, for instance, when Narmad declared that a great poet was distinguished by his intensity of imagination and passion in writing effectively of God, man and nature, and that the beauty and wonder of nature first attracted the poet’s eye, that poetry came first and the rules came next, they have the familiar ring of the ideas of English criticism, though too mixed up to be traced individually to specific sources. Again, when he stated that the sun, moon and stars inspired awe and wonder, mountains, rivers and trees affected the heart of a man; imagination worked at white heat and broke through the barriers of language and grammar, one who is a little familiar with English literary criticism would not be taken by surprise by these statements. Nonetheless, all this was new for Narmad and for most of his contemporaries, who were accustomed to the mediæval concept of poetry, which revolved round religion, devotion and morality and was generally narrative and impersonal in character.

Narmad’s views on poetry were influenced by, and sometimes directly derived from, English poetry and criticism. In theory, he generally reveals a fair grasp and awareness of the essentials of poetry, but his shortcomings stand revealed in his own poetry where he was able to realize his poetic ideals only to a limited extent. Here, partly because of his inherent limitations and partly because of his imperfect understanding of the concept of the poetry of imagination and passion, Narmad emerges a rather poor practitioner of what he preached. It has been suggested

that if Narmad had adopted Wordsworth's 'emotions' in place of Hazlitt's 'passion' as an ingredient of poetry and if he had not dissociated imagination and passion, perhaps, his poetry would have yielded better results. But it is possible that in Narmad's eye there was no distinction between the 'emotions' of Wordsworth and the 'passion' of Hazlitt, for what he appears to have meant by passion was not emotion, but passionate emotion or 'josso' as he called it. A better description of Narmad's 'josso' is what Saintsbury calls Hazlitt's 'favourite' word gusto, and Narmad's 'josso' was probably not different from what Socrates meant when he derived the power of literary creation from a certain special nature, which he described as being capable of "enthusiasm". What Narmad, however, overlooked was that 'josso', called by any name, without creative ability, critical discrimination and the power to render it adequately in words, was of little avail in poetry. Moreover, Narmad could not supplement his principle of 'josso' with Wordsworth's more important proviso that emotions were to be recollected in tranquility before they became poetry. But a greater truth than all these speculations is that a mere awareness of theories does not make poets, Narmad was temperamentally too restless and impatient a spirit to let his emotions or passions take a proper poetic form. His footnotes to his several poems reveal how he gloated over the fact that his poems were often written as soon as he was seized with a particular passion. That happened to be his ideal and the advantages and the disadvantages of this approach are for all to see in the pages of his 'Narmakavita'.

Probably, another marked influence of English poetry of the age of the Romantic Revival on the poetry of Narmad, particularly through Byron with whom

Narmad had a certain temperamental affinity, is the strain of the romantic melancholy in it. Narmad seemed to derive a sort of romantic pleasure from the contemplation of misery. In one of his poems, addressed to his beloved, he asked her to send him a picture of hers caught in a melancholy mood, and added in a footnote to the poem that he truly relished pictures of melancholy. Perhaps, "Narmad seemed to believe that melancholy was his speciality and therefore attached so much importance to it". This romanticising of melancholy was an integral part of Narmad's constitution and explains also the dearth of humour in his poetry.

In spite of his awareness of what constituted true poetry, as revealed in his essay on the 'Poets and Poetry', Narmad's actual performance was not always better than that of Dalpatram, whom he accused of revelling in rhymes. Again, his idea of the function of poetry as something that entertained and instructed, shows that poetically he was also, to some extent, a child of his age. It is in his new conception of poetry, as derived from English, that he was the architect of his age. In his new poetry, Narmad expressed many new ideas and emotions for which the existing Gujarati language had no adequate power of expression, and Narmad lacked the mastery over even that. Yet Narmad tried to make up for the deficiency by many English words, phrases and idiomatic usages.

rendered almost literally in Gujarati. He had even to coin a few words to meet
the demands of his new poetry. Sometimes, even the syntax of his sentences is
English. This shows the influences of English not only on Gujarati poetry but
also to some extent on the Gujarati language.  
Narmad complained that people
found his poetry difficult to grasp, possibly, as he put it, because the people
themselves were yet incapable of understanding poetry, or because his poetry was
at fault or because his poetry was not poetry at all.  
To these hypotheses
mentioned by Narmad, one more may be added and probably more valid than any of
them. A part of the difficulty which people, accustomed to traditional poetry,
felt in adjusting themselves to Narmad's poetry, was its newness and alien look.
Navalram, the first outstanding literary critic of Gujarat, who was well-acquainted
with English poetry and criticism, however, maintained that Narmad's poetry helped
in spreading poetic tastes among the people and that it was read with admiration
by those who were educated on the English lines.

1. Some English words had found their way for the first time in Dalpat's
poetry. In Narmad, this process continued to a still greater extent.
But besides this, there is also in Narmad probably the first conscious
or unconscious effort sometimes to adopt English construction, syntax,
punctuation and idomatic usages in his poetry. Limitation of space
permit only a few illustrations, such as, 'no one would dream of' in
the sense of 'think of' (Narmakavita, p.14); 'take home the lesson'
in the sense of 'learn the lesson' (p.34); 'the door of reform has opened'
in the sense of making a beginning (p.80); to give 'electric shock
therapy' in the sense of awakening the people (p.92); 'the gopis were
drawn towards Krishna' in the sense of 'attracted' (p.98); 'Rukmini'
took advantage of 'the opportunity' (p.98), lightning 'tore' the sky
(p.138); love-'hungry', wealth - 'hungry' in the sense of 'greedy' (p.176)
'Sparkling river (p.214); 'firm' foundation (p.228); standing 'like a
rock' in the battle (p.228); filled with passion 'from head to foot'
(p.229); 'with the ammunition' of adventure blow off the citadel of
superstition' (p.231); 'even if the heavens fall' (p.232) inward' eye (p.272);
'I am afraid you would not believe me' (p.350); 'cold' in the sense of indifferent
(p.375); 'Sweet' in the sense of 'deiar' (p.382) etc. etc.

2. Vide, Preface to 'Narmakavita', p.49.

Granting that Narmad's language was rough, crude and obscure in places, his power of expression poor, his representation inadequate, his very understanding of the new conception of poetry incomplete and his whole output largely unpoeitic, yet, his pioneering efforts in writing new subjective poetry of love, nature and patriotism of the modern English type establish him as the morning star of modern Gujarati poetry. Narmad broke new ground, pointed to larger fields and pastures new and opened new horizons for Gujarati poetry. Narmad wrote poetry for a brief period of about ten years, when suddenly the fountain of his poetry ran dry.

Narmad claims - to reproduce his own English - that he could 'write on any subject' because he 'saw poetry in everything', that he could 'paint pictures - real, ideal and poetical, - much better than any poet in the Gujarati language'; that he had 'a considerable amount of universality and originality'; and that his poetry 'had much to suggest'. This may be mere wishful thinking, if not egotism on Narmad's part, yet it was largely due to his personal efforts that Gujarati poetry came out of its old ruts and entered upon a new era of modern development.

Narmad wrote on (a) Nature, (b) Love, (c) Patriotism and Heroism, and (d) attempted some epic poetry of the Western type, and (e) adapted a few poems from English poetry. The following brief review is an attempt to show how in these subjects Gujarati poetry, through Narmad, was influenced by English poetry and poetic ideals, its style and representation.

(a) Narmad's poetry of nature which he was perhaps the first to write in Gujarati directly under the influence of English, includes his poems on the Seasons, called 'Rituvarnan' (1861), his description of the woods, called 'Vanavarman' (1862) and a description of travels, called 'Prawasvarman' (1862). Poems on the

1. 'My Thoughts on my Poetry' posthumously published in the Divali issue of the 'Gujarati', 1914, Vol.2-3.
seasons were nothing new to Indian poetic tradition. There were descriptions of the seasons and nature in Sanskrit, Prakrit and old Gujarati poetry, but they either formed parts of longer narrative poems or when self-sufficient, were impersonal in character. Narmad, on the other hand, while writing this type of poetry, looked at nature from a personal angle and depicted his individual rather than general observations of it, as Wordsworth and other English poets of the nineteenth century did. Narmad was conscious of making a new departure in Gujarati poetry, for he stated that though he had read Thomson's "Seasons", he had not borrowed anything from him or anybody. He claimed that his poem on the seasons was different from Thomson's or Kalidas's in that he had not only rendered the external scenes faithfully but also related them with his own emotions. Narmad had a certain descriptive power, like Byron, but what he claimed as his distinction often proved to be his handicap, for in trying to associate emotions with descriptions, his descriptions come to a stand-still, overpowered by his indiscriminate and inconsonant fancies and conceits. Thus, in one place, while trying to bring out the dry and barren appearance of the grassless fields, he not only put in a donkey braying in disappointment, but also in an explanatory note, equated his own mind with the donkey, wandering in the dry fields of thoughts, finding no solace. However when Narmad resisted the temptation of inserting unnatural conceits and fancies like these, he succeeded in turning out some really beautiful lines of the descriptions of the seasons and nature, as in his poem on the rainy season.

Though nature was to Narmad, as it was to Wordsworth, a balm and a solace, which healed his wounds, it was also, as it was to Byron, an avenue of escape from self. In a note to his poem 'Vanavarnam', he stated that he was so much oppressed

with the idea of human frailty and fickleness that he could find no joy or relief in the company of men or books. He, therefore, rambled over distant and solitary spots, visiting villages, sitting on the top of the hills in pouring rains and found considerable relief in the presence and contemplation of nature. Again, in another place, he remarked that nature was his beloved to whom he repaired to forget the world. In a note to his poem 'Pravasvarman', he remarked that hills, rivers, birds, beasts and even a blade of grass filled him with delight. Narmad's poem on Mount 'Brahmgiri' is a monument to his delight in the hills and is a delightful piece of landscape painting. A few note was struck with this poem and it was the 'first specimen of a true nature poem in the Gujarati language'. Among his nature poems, which do not deal with seasons, 'Kabirved', the banyan tree associated with the saint-poet Kabir, is one of Narmad's best and probably one of the best in the language. Here, there are no conceits and there is no conscious hunt for verbal embellishments or ornamentation. Another poem, "Scene from the Hill at Chaupatty", unfolds a pleasing panoramic view of the city of Bombay, lying at the foot of the hill, reminding one, in some respects, of Wordsworth's "Tintern Abbey" and "Upon the Westminster Bridge" at once and together. Narmad seems to have acquired from his acquaintance with English nature poetry, particularly of Wordsworth and Byron, the romantic qualities of colour, sound and picturesqueness, which characterise some of his poems on nature. An excellent example of the harmonious blending of all these qualities is his lovely lyric on the "Beauty of the Evening",

reminding one of some of the poems on the Evening, written by the English poets, notably Collins's "Ode to Evening". Narmad's poem on the river "Narmada" reveals his deep and sincere response to beauty in nature and shows his sense of colour, movement and even stillness. In many of his nature poems Narmad not only expressed the response to beauty that he was capable of, but also revealed some power of meditation, induced by the sights of Nature. Narmad's representation of nature was not impersonal or objective, as in the earlier Gujarati poetry, but intensely personal and subjective, as in English nature poetry. Of course, Narmad's inherent limitations as a poet dogged him everywhere and his nature poems are nowhere near perfection. Like all pioneers, Narmad had to learn his art through trial and error and if he is looked at from this historical perspective, his achievements may be found to be considerable.

(b) Narmad's poems on love, like those on nature, struck a new note in Gujarati poetry. Earlier Gujarati poetry on this subject was largely impersonal in character and when it was personal, as in the case of mediaeval devotional poets, it was related to the love of some divinity. Love between men and women, married or otherwise, was out of bounds for Gujarati poetry as being repugnant to the orthodox Indian notion of social decorum. Dalpatram, before Narmad, was a Puritan, who would not touch this subject even with a pair of tongs. Narmad was, therefore, the first among the modern Gujarati poets to write on love in the way the English poets of the early nineteenth century wrote on that subject. Temperamentally, Narmad was eminently fitted for this job, since, for one thing, he was a romantic lover in life and, for another, his theory of 'josso' or passion facilitated the expression of all that he felt at once and without restraint. He has stated that

troubled with the thoughts of love and women for months, he began writing poems on them. Narmad had a weakness for women and his affairs with them or longing for them provided him with material for many of his love poems. But, in another sense, love, in Narmad's eye, was not only an ennobling and a liberating emotion, but also, as he observed in his poem entitled "Intoxication of Love", and in the lines beginning with "God, always give me love", a link between man and God. This concept of love as a link between man and God was different from that in the earlier devotional poetry, where the accent was on devotion, and may be ascribed to the influence of English poetry, and, as one critic suggests, 'the Christian thought through it'. However, it is not for this godly type of love that Narmad's poetry enjoys any preeminence. It is rather for his poems of romantic love between man and woman that he made his mark. His poems in this category project his romanticism and his passions for his different love-objects, and here, sometimes, like Byron, he wears his heart on his sleeve and flaunts for public gaze the pageant of a love-lorn heart. Narmad's poems of love are not always in good taste, but his motto of life "Love and Valour", which he had had carved on the porch of his own house at Surat, was also something carved on his own heart. In his conception of love, Narmad was nearer to Byron than to Shelley among the English poets.

Thus, Narmad opened for Gujarati poetry a new avenue of lyricism of personal emotions of love. Love was there in earlier Gujarati poetry and so was lyricism in some measure. But love, religion, devotion and divinity were indistinguishable before Narmad, who was the first to write boldly and candidly of worldly love.

without calling upon Radha or Krishna, as in the past, to do the proxy-wooing for the poet. Romantic love and romantic melancholy often go together and Narmad's love poems frequently depict the melancholy aspect of love, indeed so much so that the sad face of a beloved was sweeter to him than a smiling one as has been noted earlier.\(^1\) This is not surprising, since for all romantic poets, writing on love, their sweetest songs are those that tell of saddest thoughts.

(c) Narmad's patriotic and heroic poems are the work of a man, who was during his lifetime and is, after his death, acclaimed as a hero and a patriot. If there was any composition that needed no artificial aid of expression for Narmad, it was these poems, for they came straight from his bosom. Sometimes his patriotic poems are juxtaposed with his loyalist verses on the English regime and on the Indian Mutiny to suggest that his patriotism was skin-deep. In particular, his poem containing an appeal for relief to the English women, who were rendered widows as a result of their soldier-husbands' death in the Mutiny,\(^2\) has sometimes come in for severe criticism, but it has to be remembered that, in the first place, it was a sort of a formal performance in a Town Hall, and, in the second, it issued from a larger humanism, which would not withhold its sympathy for suffering on the ground of nationality, creed or colour. Narmad loved his country and he had also the courage to criticize the English when occasion demanded it. In a footnote to his poem entitled "Freedom"\(^3\) he stated that having read in the newspapers of the English atrocities on the 'Vaghers' he was so much perturbed that he could think of nothing else. The poem contains Narmad's unambiguous views on freedom, which he considered the first condition of growth. He believed that no nation, however, great,

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had the right to enslave another, that human dignity and slavery could never go
together, that there should be constitutional limits to the rights of Kings, and
that if the Kings failed in their duty, the subjects would be justified in rising
in revolt against them. Gujarati poets in the past, no doubt, must have
intensely loved their country, but few of them felt the urge or saw the need for
introducing patriotism as a theme in their poetry. Narmad was the first among
the Gujarati poets to sing of patriotism and of his love for Gujarat. The acute
awareness of the idea of freedom was paradoxically the gift of the English, who
had at the same time deprived India of her freedom. English poetry, with its
patriotism and love of liberty, as expressed by English poets from Shakespeare
to Byron, could not but have struck a responsive chord in patriotic Narmad, who, like
Byron, was also a born fighter for freedom of every sort and description. It is
true that, like Dalpatram, Narmad wrote in praise of the English rulers and their
regime, for instance, his verses on Queen Victoria; on the Prince of Wales' Visit
to India; and on the death of Prince Albert, but that was because Narmad knew,
like millions of his countrymen, the blessings and benefits of the English regime
too well to condemn the regime outright or to be niggardly in his appreciation of
the English rulers where appreciation was due. His "How long is this slavery to
be suffered?" and "Fie, fie, slavery," besides reminding one of the fiery
utterances of Thomas Campbell and Byron, set at rest all doubts about the genuineness
of Narmad's patriotism and love of liberty. Narmad not only held that good

government was no substitute for self-government, but he also had the rare vision to suggest that linguistic, religious and political unity was essential for the stability of the country. He added that this unity was feasible only to a heroic people and therefore laid great stress on heroism with patriotism. To inspire his countrymen with heroism, he was proud to be in the vanguard singing songs of inspiration to them (like a heroic bard "Kadkhed"). In a foot-note to his poem depicting the "characteristics of the Heroes", Narmad observed that, in order to forget his private sorrows, he began reading heroic poetry, read Homer's 'Iliad' and resolved to write a similar poem. Narmad envisaged four types of heroes, a soldier fighting against enemies, a man fighting the battle of life against adversities, a social reformer fighting against social evils and a political fighter, fighting for freedom, which is reminiscent of Carlyle's concept of the "Hero and Hero-Worship". His spirited poem "On, on! to battle; the bugles are blowing; plunge headlong; success awaits you", enshrines his spirit of fight in memorable words.

Narmad's principle of 'josso' or passion as the chief ingredient of poetry proved an asset in his patriotic and heroic poetry. It enabled him to produce some of the most memorable verses in the Gujarati language, of which probably the sweetest and the saddest is his "Do not grieve over me, my friends, when I am gone", which incidentally, he wished to be inscribed as his epitaph. His love

5. For instance, 'Narmakavita', pp. 217, 228, 229.
of Gujarat found a fervent and an immortal expression in his famous song "Jai Jai Garvi Gujarat" - "Hail to thee, glorious Gujarat"¹ and in his "Koni Koni Chhe Gujarat" - "To who does Gujarat belong?"² which are no petrile products of local patriotism, but variations of "Breathes there the man with soul so dead who never to himself hath said this is my own, own native land?"³ which, by the way, he also adapted in Gujarati.⁴ Narmad has been hailed as a hero in Gujarat and his poetry of patriotism and heroism justifies that title. Perhaps, there is something of a Byronic pose in some of Narmad's attitude towards love, reform and poetry, but his patriotism and heroism are above board. His heroic and patriotic poetry therefore bids fair to be more enduring than the rest of his poetic output, if one were to apply Carlyle's test, as he applied to Burns, that sincerity was the touchstone of poetry.

(d) Narmad was the first among the modern Gujarati poets to attempt an epic poem as it is understood in English. He made three attempts with three different themes in different metres, but could not proceed beyond some ninety lines of his first attempt, "Jeevraj", and about 400 lines each of "Rudanrasik" and "Veeratnh'. The first fragment, insignificant as a poem, is remarkable for Narmad's representation of his 'epic' hero as the trustee of the interests of his subjects. The second enunciated at the outset Narmad's conception of poetry in twenty-four couplets and the third depicted his hero, wailing for the loss of freedom and languishing in a royal prison, reminiscent of Byron's "Prisoner of Chillon". In none of these, however, Narmad showed any evidence of an epic genius, but his thoughts and views on the Epic show how the influence of English worked on him. In a long note appended to his poem "The Decline of the Hindus", which he had

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originally planned as an epic, he states that it was his intention to write a long poem, possibly of a type known as an epic in English. He added that for doing so, a suitable hero and an interesting story from Indian history were essential, the theme being enriched with side-stories, written in a single metre. Finding that there was nothing of the kind available except in Sanskrit and Prakrit, he felt that he should work on an imaginary story with an imaginary hero. He then thought of four or five alternatives, one of which was to imagine an Indian King, named "Sudharaditya" - the Sun of Reform - battling with the 'Monster of Superstition', overpowering the monster to begin with, but later overpowered by the monster, escaping to Europe and returning after a time to finally crush the Monster.

It is obvious that though Narmad's conscious planning is reminiscent of Milton, his conception of the epic is nearer to that of Spenser than to that of Milton, since his whole approach is allegorical as in Spenser. The approach is the same in his another "epic" project, where he imagined a Rajput hero named Jeevraj, who allured by the beauty and heroic qualities of a lady called 'Kirtiba' or Fame, married her. Brief happiness followed by a life of sensuousness, consequent neglect of his kingdom and the chaos which followed, compelled the hero to run away to England - the land of liberty - which, in course of time, re-awakened his love of the land and brought him back to his country, where he established order and prosperity, introduced Western type of reforms and laid the foundation of a 'Dharmarajya'. Here also, Narmad could not go beyond the Spenserian conception of virtue allegorically disguised as a Knight, marrying a damsel, Fame, and establishing a moral kingdom on earth, achieved through chivalry and heroic adventures. After contemplating other subjects for his ambitious dream of writing an epic, Narmad even thought of resting content with a translation of Homer's 'Iliad' in Gujarati. The thought of writing an epic returned to him and he began

working on his "Veersinh", in a footnote to which, he stated that after his two earlier infructuous attempts at writing an epic poem, he studied English books, tried to understand fully what an epic poem was, and resolved to make one more attempt. Since his intention in writing an epic was to arouse patriotic feelings among his countrymen, he was inclined to adopt some heroic subject from Indian history. He also gave serious thought to the metre suitable for an epic and even tried to adapt English metres in Gujarati, but was not satisfied with the results. Finally, he evolved for the purpose a new Gujarati metre, which he named "Veervrutta".

(e) Narmad was lucky with his English Professors in the sense that they often helped him with their suggestions and guidance to do in Gujarati what was done in English. Thus, on June 24, 1861, Dr. Harkness, a former Principal of the Elphinstone College, where Narmad had studied under him, meeting Narmad in the Governor's bungalow exhorted him to do in Gujarati something on the lines of Milton's "Comus", and another Englishman Mr. Faulkner advised him to work on the lines of Byron's "Don Juan". It is not, however, known whether Narmad actually worked on them or not, but what is more relevant here is the fact that not only was Narmad inspired by the English poetry he had read but that he was also encouraged in his pursuit by his English friends and professors. Narmad himself has recorded that, once, the Governor of Bombay was so much impressed with the recitation of one of his poems that he asked him to translate it into English and he volunteered to have it sent to Tennyson, whom he claimed as his friend.

Narmad adapted a few English poems into Gujarati. His 'Lalita' is an

"Narmakavita"
adaptation of Wordsworth's 'Lucy Gray'; 'Sahas Desai'⁠¹ of Southey's 'Lord William'; and his 'Vaji' of Wordsworth's 'We are Seven'. Besides, he also translated into Gujarati a part of Portia's speech 'The quality of mercy' etc. in 'The Merchant of Venice'⁠³ and Walter Scott's poem 'Breathes There the Man'⁣⁴ none of which shows that Narmad had much talent for this kind of work.

The influence of English poetry is writ large upon Narmad's poetry and as a source of inspiration, both English poetry and criticism played a major role in the making of Narmad, the first among the modern poets of Gujarat. But his entire output of over 800 pages of verse - good, bad and indifferent - reveals the fact that he never tried to beautify himself with borrowed feathers or seek to hide his indebtedness when he was in debt. In this context, his confidence that even his enemies would be compelled to speak warmly of his qualities of heroism, truthfulness and integrity⁵ was neither misplaced nor exaggerated. It is true that Narmad always liked to be in the limelight,⁶ it is true that in a fit of self-glorification, while assigning 100 marks to Homer, he assigned 70 to himself,⁷ but posterity is not bound to accept what the poet thought of himself or even what his contemporaries thought of him. Yet, the opinion of Narmad's contemporary Navalram, that Narmad was 'the sensitive barometer, mirror or the most representative man of his age'⁸ cannot be lightly brushed aside, for it puts Narmad's position in the proper historical perspective. Narmad as a poet, judged by the highest standards, is decidedly not great. But if Narmad, like Wordsworth, were to find his Matthew Arnold, he would yield about a hundred pages of true poetry, which would leave little room for doubt that Narmad had,

what Dr. A.B. Dhruv called, "the poetry of a true heart". Above all, as a heroic pioneer in the many fields of life and literature of Gujarat, he commands universal admiration. He was, in Gujarat, the first modern prose writer, the first lexicographer, the first author of a manual on prosody, the first to devote himself entirely to his pen and the first among the modern poets of Gujarat, imbibing and expressing to the best of his abilities the revolutionary changes in the life and thought of his country, which had come under the powerful impact of the English and which just then was reaping its first harvest of the influence of English, and, through it, of the West.

1. Vide, 'Sahityavichar', p. 34.