Chapter XI
THE PIONEERS (Continued)

(3) The Other Poets

MORE ATTEMPTS AND ADAPTATIONS : EXPERIMENTS IN NEW ELEGIAIC POETRY

Though Gujarati poetry of the middle of the nineteenth century turns on the Dalpat-Narmad axis, there were a number of other poets, who produced several volumes of verse. Except for a few independent writers these poets, in their poetry, were generally camp-followers of either Dalpatram or Narmad. Narmad was the more difficult to follow or emulate, for it meant attempting something unconventional and different, and hence majority of the minor poets of this period, in their conception and expression, are found rather with Dalpatram, whose approach to poetry was, in a large measure, traditional. Among those who showed some independence were (1) Hirachand Kanji, who was among the first to question Narmad's title to be considered a poet,¹ and (2) Har Govinddas Kantawalla, who lived long enough to offer two volumes of verse at an interval of forty-six years between them.² Hirachand's poems, though not imitative, are traditional in character. He used in his verse some English words, such as, newspaper, furniture, sculpture, etc. probably because they had by this time become almost common currency and a part of the language of the educated Gujaratis. Similarly, Kantawalla's heroic poem 'Panipat' was based on the material derived from Indian history written by Englishmen.³ The third poet of considerable poetic ability, Shivalal Dhaneshwar, who opened his career as a school teacher and ended as a Judge in the native State of Kuchha, wrote a number of poems of which 'Pravasvarman' or the description of his travel from Kuchha to Mahabaleshwar in Western India, is noteworthy for its vivid descriptions of nature and places of historical interest. The poem also reveals his admiration.

¹ Vide, his poem 'Nithyabhimankhandan'
² Vide, his "Panipat or Kurukshetra" - 1867, and 'Vishva ni Vichitrata', 1913.
³ Vide, Sunderam : "Arvachin Kavita", p.54.
on this side of idolatry, of the English. (4) Navalram, better known as a critic than as a poet, also wrote some poetry, ostensibly with a didactic intent, yet not without occasional sparks of true poetic feeling and imagination. In one of his poems he took the prevalent social custom of early marriages as his theme, and used powerful weapon of laughter in his war against this evil. In another, primarily intended for school-girls, he rose above his immediate objective and soared at times into the realm of true poetry combining the best qualities of Dalpatram and Narmad. The poems, which were intended for young children, made their subjects like the lessons in history and geography interesting.

An interesting part of Navalram's work, however, was his poetry of nature, particularly his song depicting the skylark singing as it soared and soaring as it sang - its close resemblance with the fancy and imagery in Shelley's "Skylark" being very striking. (5) Mehtaji Ganapatram Rajaram, besides writing on the then burning social problem of early marriages, produced 'A History of the Education Department in Broach District' in verse, which incidentally is characteristic, though an extreme illustration of how any subject was then considered fit enough for poetry. The poet was, however, able to save his work from being a mere report by giving an interesting picture of the social conditions then prevailing in Gujarat. (6) Bholanath Sarabhai composed "Ishwarprathamala" or "A Rosary of Prayers to God" which was meant to be sung like Psalms.

There were more than fifty writers of verse, who carried on the tradition of Dalpatram's poetry and about a dozen others, who tried to follow the footsteps of Narmad. They generally wrote poetry of the traditional type.

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1. Vide, "Ballagnabatisi".
2. Vide, "Balgarbavali".
A few exceptions may, however, be noted. Among them is Ranchhod Galuram who wrote a poem called "Matruviyog", a kind of an elegiac poem on his own mother, which in its predominantly personal and subjective note, may be taken as one, probably the first of the good elegies in Gujarati, at once marked out from the traditional elegiac wails of earlier poetry. Elegy, as a distinct form of lyrical poetry of the English type, began later probably with Narsinhrao. This poem may, therefore, be taken as a precursor of the others written under the influence of English poetry. Mahashanker P. Joshi's verses on the "Great Discoveries of the World" (1872) are noteworthy for their modern and unusual themes and their effective representation. Of the Parsi poets, who then wrote in standard Gujarati, Behramji M. Malabari was perhaps the most outstanding. His elegiac poem "Wilsonvirah" (1878) on Dr. Wilson, a noted missionary working in India had Dalpatram's elegy on Forbes as its model. The elegy also embodied a portion written on the death of Mrs. Wilson, which is unusually poetic and touching in its appeal. The whole poem has a distinctly personal approach, characteristic of elegies written in English. His patriotic poems in his "Sansarika" (1898) continued the tradition set by Narmad and provide further evidence of the influence of English on Gujarati poetry. Here, Malabari, who knew English very well and who had even made a trip to England to persuade the British Government to legislate against early marriages in India, tried his hand at many new themes, the most remarkable of which was probably one in his poem on "Silence". Another Parsi poet, Dadi E. Taraporewalla produced a delightful and satirical piece, entitled the "Dissension Among the Animals", forming part of a long poem called "Preserver of the Rights of Animals" (1896), which in itself was something new as a theme in Gujarati poetry. Dalpatram's pupil, Kashishanker M. Dave, wrote two elegiac poems on Narmad (1896) and Dalpat
(1898), which go to show how this form was increasingly cultivated by the Gujarati poets in the latter half of the nineteenth century. Another poet Nathuram Sunderji wrote an elegy on the Prince of Forbunder, which generally followed Dalpatram's lead. He also wrote on the "Seasons" in a style reminiscent of Narmad. One more elegiac poem, this time on the death of the poet's sister, came from the pen of Chhotalal Sevakram. The poem was probably the first among those written on a sister and was marked by certain characteristics of an elegy of the English type. Mahasukhram Narbheram, who wrote generally in Dalpatram's style, however, gave a delightfully different poem on the "World of Birds", (1907) developed on satirical lines, ridiculing certain undesirable human traits. The crane talking against hypocrisy and the locust advising against gluttony are delightful pieces of irony and sarcasm, almost in the vein of Swift. Another poet Umashankar Khushalrai wrote a lengthy eulogy of the "British Regime", including one on Queen Victoria, which incidentally carried Narmad's certificate of merit with it. Madhuvachram Balvachhram wrote on love and eroticism in Narmad's style for he was, like Narmad, a believer in writing as soon as the 'passion' came over him. His "Suvasika" (1888) tells the romantic story of love between a boy and a girl brought up together in the lap of nature, ending in their tragic separation and death. Historically the work of the Parsi poet J.N. Petit, who was educated on the English lines and who began writing verses at the early age of seventeen, is significant in the sense that it reveals, though in a crude form, the influence of the "English school (type) of poetry".

His volume of collected verses, entitled "My Recreation and Other Poems" show, how under the influence of English, he handled a variety of new subjects in Gujarati poetry. In his poems on nature, in particular, he looked at nature from a personal

angle and adopted the typical approach of the English romantic poets, while
admiring its beauty without succumbing to the temptation of being didactic like
traditional Gujarati poets. The editor of Petit's volumes, J.P. Mistri, claimed
that Petit's verses were read "with the same delight with which we read a page
of Cowper's "Task" or Thomson's "Seasons", and that its style was 'so free from
the trammels and superstitions of artificial writers that its very quaintness is
music to the ear". Petit also translated into Gujarati many English poems by
different English poets, including Ben Jonson, Cowper, Longfellow, Thomas Moore
and Southey, - which occupy about ninety of the five hundred pages of his
collected verses. His editor, in his Preface, referred to above, compared Petit
to the English poets Samuel Rogers and asked the Parsi community to be proud of
him. After Dalpatram and Harmed, Petit appeared to be the most amenable to
English influence. As a poet, however, he was very poor and his language fell
far short of literary distinction.

Cowper's highly diverting poem 'The Ballad of John Gilpin' was adapted
by a poet named Bapalal B. Bhatt under the title "Sumchandsheth-ni-ujani" in his
'Subodh Garbavali'. Shelley's well-known lyric 'Love's Philosophy' has been
translated, adapted and imitated by several Gujarati poets, among whom may be
mentioned Harilal Dhruv in one of his poems in 'Kunjvihar', and Bulashanker in
'Hari prem Panchadashi'. Harilal Dhruv and Bheemrao Bholanath were deeply
impressed by English poetry. (Vide, Narsinhrao Bholanath Divatia : 'Varshik
Vyakhana', Gujarat Vidyasabha, p.135). Bheemrao's poem 'Jubilee' (Vide,
'Kusumanjali', pp.43-47) is a typical product of the poetry of the twilight.
Bheemrao was a great admirer of Walter Scott. (Vide, N.B.Divatia Op. cit. p.146).

His long heroic poem 'Pruthurajras' includes 'Invocation to the Veena', which is indebted to Scott's 'Harp of the North' in the 'Lady of the Lake', which later on was also utilized by another poet, Kalepi.

This brief review reveals how the work started by Dalpatram and Narmad was, to some extent, carried on by others and how Gujarati poetry was slowly moving away from its traditional pattern and conception, particularly in the field of subjective poetry. In Dalpatram there is a glimmering, in Narmad the first clear evidence, in these minor poets the additional proof, of Gujarati poetry breaking away from its past and entering upon a new era of development under the influence of English. This revolutionary change in the very character and complexion of Gujarati poetry gained further momentum in 1887 with the publication of Narsinhrao Divatia's 'Kusummala', written expressly with a view to introducing in Gujarat, the type of poetry written in England and the West.