CHAPTER XII

GQMCLUSI OHS

The influence of English on Gujarati poetry, which is but a part of
the all-pervading influence, which the English exercised on the life and
literatures of India, began gradually with the introduction of the English
type of education in Gujarat. Young men, who were the beneficiaries of this
education, were in the forefront of the movement for social, cultural and
religious reforms, as they were the pioneers of modern Gujarati poetry, written
under the influence of English poetry which they studied in schools and colleges,
as a compulsory part of their education. Poet Dayaram died in 1852, but neither
his poetry nor that of his predecessors bears any evidence of the influence of
English thought, language or poetry. The far-reaching changes in the contents
and expression of Gujarati poetry since 1852, therefore, come out as a startling
phenomenon, which would, however, appear less startling if it is recalled that
it was not Gujarati poetry and literature alone, but the literatures in all the
major modern Indian languages also had their Renaissance at about the same time.

Between the gradual disappearance of the earlier poetic tradition and
the emergence of the new Gujarati poetry, was the inevitable period of transition,
where the indirect influence of the time-spirit and the general admiration of
the people for almost everything English were as decisive as the direct influence
of English on its final outcome. Of this, poet Dalpatram is perhaps the best
illustration. In an 'English' age, he knew little of English, but he inhaled a
number of new ideas from the air he breathed. His living contact with Englishmen
and those who knew English inspired him to write poetry, which sought to break
with the past and link itself with the one, which was nearer to English poetry in certain respects. His epoch-making little poem on the Pippal tree in 1845, his long poem 'The Invasion of Industry', his poems on the 'Seasons' and those on the 'Young Fly', 'Cobbler's Stone', the astounding 'Apostrophe to a Chair' and his elegiac poem on the death of his friend Forbes—to say nothing of his adaptation of Aristophanes's comedy—were all intimations of the more sweeping changes to come in modern Gujarati poetry.

The English conception of poetry first entered into Gujarati poetry in its tentative form with Narmad, who unlike Dalpatram, was a product of the English education. The emphasis which he gave on writing poetry spontaneously and at once in response to what he called 'josso' or passion at the moment, was partly derived from Hazlitt's definition of poetry as an expression of passion, and partly from Wordsworth's principle of the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings, without of course, Wordsworth's more important proviso that emotions were to be recollected in tranquility. Some of the ingredients of English lyrical poetry—subjectivity, spontaneity and intensity of emotions—then began appearing in modern Gujarati poetry through a variety of subjects, such as, love, Nature and patriotism which Narmad was the first to attempt.

The first deliberate and organized attempt at writing Gujarati poetry of the English type is, however, to be found in the 'Kusummalay' by Narsinhrao Divatia, who sought to divert the stream of Gujarati poetry along the 'English channel' by holding before it the model of English poetry, particularly romantic lyrical English poetry, collected in the Fourth Book of Palgrave's 'Golden Treasury', which was for years studied as a text in the University of Bombay.

The choice of the model was significant. Not only was the new Gujarati poetry subjective and lyrical, but the new Gujarati literary criticism, which then also came into existence, suggested that true poetry could only be subjective in
character and lyrical in expression. This notion of subjectivity in lyricism of a secular nature, which was first tentatively enunciated by Narraad through his contact with English poetry of the same type, and which later came to be increasingly adopted, was the outcome of a reaction against the earlier type of Gujarati poetry and encouraged by the subjective and lyrical variety of English poetry, which the educated young writers had then come into contact with.

Almost all the characteristics and forms of this variety of English poetry are found in Gujarati poetry, written since 1852. These characteristics are—subjectivity, spontaneity, intensity of emotions, romanticism, idealism, naturalism and romantic melancholy. The poetic forms are mostly lyrical—the ballad, song, ode, elegy, dirge, sonnet, dramatic lyric and the lyrical play most of them now domiciled in Gujarati poetry. Wordsworth, Shelley, Keats, Byron, Tennyson, Browning and Dante Rossetti were among the English poets who affected the approach, style, diction, representation and contents of Gujarati poetry for about three quarters of a century since 1852, and several Gujarati poets confessed to their poetic taste and conception as being nurtured on English poetry.

A parallel development was the new narrative poetry of the English variety, which was first assayed in the 'episode'-poems of Kant and then in those of Harsinhrao and Kalapi, among others.

The subjective note, which was faintly heard at first in Dalpatram, grew almost egoistic in Narraad and autobiographical in Kant and Kalapi, who drew more and more on the inner resources of their own private emotions and experiences for their poetry, till it met with a determined opposition in Thakore, who advised the poet to travel beyond his ego-centre and seek extrinsic sources of poetic inspiration, insisting as Matthew Arnold had done, that the highest type of poetry was impersonal. This was a reaction not only against subjectivity, but also against
romanticism, which had assumed its most utopian form in the romantic idealism of Hanalal who was almost like Matthew Arnold's picture of Shelley, flapping his luminous wings in the void. In England, romantic lyricism had come in the wake of a reaction against the neo-classicism of the Augustan poets. In Gujarat, the order seemed to be partly reversed and partly linked with, what Saintsbury has called, the 'Nectato'-classicism of Matthew Arnold, who also admitted a little of romanticism in his classicism. Of this variety of English poetry, Thakore's is perhaps the most significant illustration in Gujarati poetry.

Another marked influence of the English poetry of the Romantic Revival, particularly through Shelley, Keats and Byron, was the strain of romantic melancholy, which first appeared in the poetry of Harmadh, who seemed to derive a sort of romantic pleasure from the contemplation of misery. The trend grew stronger in Marsinhrao, who likened himself to a musical instrument with a special relish for tragic notes. In Kant's poetry, it assumed the proportions of a philosophic pessimism and a tragic vision of life, with an emphasis, as in Hardy, on the malignity of Fate, over which man had no control. This reached its decadence in the poetry of Kalapi, who was even impelled to generalize that all poets, including Shelley, and himself, were unhappy souls and that poetry, for that reason, was a prolonged wail or a sob, till Hanalal, through his poetry, and Thakore, through his criticism, cried a halt to this tendency, which had rendered, according to Thakore, most of the Gujarat poetry of the middle of the nineteenth century tearful, spineless and verveless. Joyousness, hope and cheer, after a brief interlude in the Gujarati poetry of the 'thirties, when the poets toyed with the idea of universal peace, love and brotherhood, once again seemed to have left the present day Existentialist Gujarati poetry, which appears to be seized, like modern English poetry, with a neurosis of anxiety. The
note of the cuckoo, with which 'the vale was loud' in Janalal and sometimes in Umashanker, is rarely heard, and Spring has all but vanished as a symbol of joy and hope in contemporary Gujarati poetry, which now talks of darkness, death, disintegration and frustration, believing perhaps like Valery that 'our fears are infinitely more precise than our hopes.' In this attitude, the influence of early Eliot and Auden, of Edith Sitwell, Baudelaire and Sartre has played a very significant part.

The same development is also seen with regard to the poetic forms, which modern Gujarati poetry adopted from English poetry since 1852, that lyric, song, ode, elegy and the dirge were almost immediately seized upon. Most of the modern Gujarati poetry, excepting the more recent one, which like English poetry of to-day has discarded all labels, is lyrical. The elegy, which was experimental in Dalpatram's 'Farbes virah' and Malbari's 'Wilsonvirah', reached its culmination in Marsinhrao's 'Samanasamhita', which had Tennyson's 'In Memoriam' as its model. In the 'thirties and the 'forties, several poets, such as, Umashanker, Sunderam, Mansukhlal and Betai, wrote elegiac poems of the English type. In more recent Gujarati poetry, the elegy is rarely to be found excepting in a revised form, as for instance in Hiranjan Bhagat's 'Samsruti' in his collection 'Chhandolaya'.

The ode, which was used as a poetic form, among others, by Kant in his poem on Kalapi and by Thakore in his poem entitled the 'Ascent', reached perhaps its most beautiful expression later in Umashanker's poem 'Midnight'. But, barring a few instances here and there, this poetic form in Gujarati poetry, which had in one way, or another Shelley's odes to the Skylark and the West Wind in view as a model, (as in Sunderam's poem entitled 'Whirlwind') ceased to attract the younger poets of the present time, who preferably express themselves in shorter lengths and unconventional forms.
The sonnet, curiously made, a belated appearance. Kant had translated a few of Mrs. Browning's sonnets and made some attempts at original compositions in this form. But he generally left them at less than fourteen lines, probably not finding himself quite at home with this very exacting form. Narsinhrao wrote a solitary one towards the end of his career; Kalapi probably found it too scanty for his profusion of feelings; and Nanalal's few attempts at it are nowhere near the mark. The sonnet, however, came to be firmly established in Gujarati poetry through Thakore's extensive experimentation with all its regular and irregular varieties in a variety of subjects, including the Second World War. The sonnet found another prolific exponent in Khabardar who, incidentally, claimed that his was the most authentic form of the sonnet, since it was based on the traditional rhyme-scheme of the Petrarchan sonnet. Later, in the thirties, the sonnet was extensively cultivated and even a few sonnet-sequences, for instance, by C.C. Mehta and Umashanker, were successfully attempted, till in the forties and later, the sonnet along with the other traditional forms fell progressively out of favour with the younger poets.

Of the other English lyrical forms, the song was nothing new to Gujarati poetry; the only change necessary was to secularize its contents. Narmad wrote a number of songs, while Narsinhrao even classified his first collection of verses as 'musical poems'. Nanalal's songs, which often derived inspiration from the traditional and folk-songs of Gujarat, were lyrical, musical and modern at the same time. Old and Medieval Gujarati poetry, chiefly because of its oral tradition, had a musical propensity, which was carried on even in modern Gujarati poetry, till gradually under the influence of English poetry its musical propensity was sought to be curbed through the determined efforts of Thakore, who tartly described 'poor Gujarati poetry' as 'a slave to music'. The tendency to recite rather than chant or sing Gujarati poetry came through the influence of English poetry and though
Gujarati poetry even at present has not altogether given up its love of music - a number of contemporary Gujarati poets have written a number of songs - it has now come to be recognized, as in English poetry, that the so-called song need not be singable.

There were a few attempts, mostly inconsequential, at writing the epic of the English type in Gujarati poetry. As generally always, Narmad was the first among the Gujarati poets to attempt an epic of the Miltonic type and go out in quest of an equivalent of the 'grand metre' or the English Blank Verse in Gujarati. Kalapi then tried his hand at it, but his model was not Milton, but Walter Scott, and what ensued was a specimen of heroic, but not of epic, if not of 'bastard' epic poetry. Thakore began, but gave up the attempt, which incidentally also opened with a quotation from Scott, leaving only 'Broken Twig' as a memento of an incomplete project. One more attempt followed. Nanalal claimed his 'Kurukshestra' as belonging to the Miltonic variety of the epic, but neither his poem nor the 'rhythmic style' in which he wrote it was anywhere near the English conception of the epic or the Blank Verse.

The lyrical plays, which Nanalal wrote, belonged, on the poet's own admission, to the type of Shelley's 'Prometheus Unbound'. These plays, whose fitness for the stage, to put it mildly, is doubtful, belong to the variety of closet-plays, written by Shelley, Byron and Tennyson in England. Moreover, these plays are not written in verse, but in Nanalal's 'rhythmic style', which is neither prose nor verse.

The dramatic lyric in its purest English form has not such flourished in modern Gujarati poetry. It partly appeared at first in the guise of the new narrative poetry of the English type assayed by Kant and later by Narasinha Rao, Kalapi and others, in 'episode' poems, called the 'Khandakavya'. These poems were objective in representation, but not a little subjective in tone. They are an
interesting amalgam of the dramatic lyric in their representation of dramatic
personae in a dramatic situation, as in Browning, and of the idyll in their
narrative interest, as in Tennyson. The dramatic lyric, as tried later by Thakore
in his long poem 'A Day of Love', was presented experimentally even as a sonnet-
sequence. A variation on this form is to be found in Umashanker Joshi's pieces
in the 'Prachina' which are described by the poet himself as 'dialoge-poems'.
A further development of this form is the Internal Monologue, which a number of
contemporary Gujarati poets from Niranjan Bhagat to Gulam Mohammed Shaikh, as
also Umashanker Joshi in some of his later poems, use like their counterparts
in English, French and American poetry.

These varied poetic forms were used for a wide variety of new subjects,
which came to be introduced in modern Gujarati poetry under the influence of
English poetry. Gujarati poetry of the third quarter of the nineteenth century
was largely occupied with the subject of social reform, but there was also
poetry of love and Nature. There was indeed poetry of love and Nature in earlier
Gujarati poetry, but love was generally related to God, and Nature was mostly
described impersonally. What distinguished modern Gujarati poetry from its past
in the treatment of these subjects was its subjective approach, where the poet
expressed his own emotions in his own person. The Wordsworthian attitude towards
Nature passed on, in all its details, to Narsinhrao's poetry of Nature. This
was already hinted at a little earlier in the poetry of Narmad, who spoke of the
healing power of Nature in a typically Wordsworthian vein, and of a romantic escape
from the stress and strain of modern life in Byron's style. Nature was seen in
relation to Man and as a living presence, rather than as a spectacle to be feared
or admired. Nature also came to be used as a background to human emotions and
a vast body of Nature poetry with a sensuous appeal, as in Shelley, Keats and
Tennyson, came to be written. All aspects of Nature—beautiful sublime and terrible—were touched upon, till in course of time it generated a reaction against Wordsworthian or Tennysonian way of looking at Nature. Gujarati poetry of the 'thirties has an amount of Nature poetry, but later on mostly the cheerless and dreary aspects of Nature came to be used symbolically, as in more recent Gujarati poetry which often uses Autumn and Summer to suggest the dreariness and heat of modern existence.

Romantic lyricism of love of the English type first appeared in Narmad along with its characteristic romantic melancholy and gradually developed, under the influence of Shelley, Keats and Byron, with Kant and Kalapi, till it emerged in its most exuberant form in Nanalal's poetry, which shed the earlier trend of romantic melancholy. Gujarati poets of the 'thirties also wrote and sang romantically of love. The poets of the 'forties invested it with a New Romanticism, till the later poets made it almost pathological.

Poems on patriotism and friendship were directly derived from English poetic tradition, while the humanist and Marxist poems in the 'thirties could be directly or indirectly related to Thomas Hood, Auden and Spender, as also to the general climate of opinion in several parts of the world. Imagism, Symbolism and Existentialism in more recent Gujarati poetry have their parallels in English, French and American poetry, with which generally, the younger generation of the contemporary Gujarati poetry is quite familiar.

Several metrical experiments, particularly in Blank Verse, in Gujarati also came through the influence of English poetry. Different permutations and combinations of Sanskrit and indigenous Gujarati metres were tried to meet the
new expressional needs of the Gujarati poets, who wrote on new subjects and in new poetic forms. While the extreme position was taken by Nanalal, who looked upon all metres as fetters on the poet's freedom of expression and consequently evolved his highly individualistic 'rhythmic style', which is, however, not the free verse of modern conception, but more or less impassioned prose. The most significant metrical innovation was perhaps Thakore's unrhymed continuous verse in Gujarati, which could flow uninterrupted not only from line to line, but also from stanza to stanza and read like a paragraph. This was the nearest equivalent to the English Blank Verse, which came to be used by several Gujarati poets of the 'thirties, till this, along with most of the other traditional Gujarati metres, lost favour with the present-day poets, who strive increasingly to achieve rhythmic patterns and prose-rhythms in their poems, which like the generality of English poems of to-day, are unclassifiable in familiar terms of romanticism, classicism, subjectivity, objectivity or poetic forms.

Under the influence of English poetry, modern Gujarati poetry, to begin with, was mostly concerned with the handling of new subjects in forms, partly old and partly new. New poetic forms, mostly lyrical, then came to be employed on a large scale, till they became domiciled and almost indistinguishable from modern Gujarati poetic tradition. Idealistic, naturalistic, romantic, realistic or surrealist, Imagist, Symbolic or Existentialist technique and representation; subjective and psycho-analytical approach; poetic diction and prose-rhythms; syntactical and semantic changes; punctuation and paragraph; directness or indirection of statement; paraphrasable meaning or the loss of it; harmonious or violent yoking of ideas and images, in Gujarati poetry from 1852 to 1962, are all,
in varying proportions, affected by English poetry and through it, partly, French and American poetry. So rapid and complete is the transformation under this influence that a typical Gujarati poem of 1962, has little in common with that written before 1852, and if Gujarati poetry since 1852 was gradually moving closer to the English conception and representation of poetry, Gujarati poetry of 1962, in almost every respect, is closer than ever to English poetry. Yet, it remains to be said that, excepting for a short duration in the beginning, modern Gujarati poetry is not derivative, but emulative. As in all other fields of life and literature, its Keynote is assimilation and synthesis — a Keynote (vide, ante, P.1.) struck in the ancient Vedic prayer 'Let all good thoughts come to us from all directions' and sounded again by Mahatma Gandhi's words 'I want the cultures of all the lands to be blown about my house as freely as possible; but I refuse to be blown off my feet by any'.

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