Chapter III.

THE INDIAN RENAISSANCE

There are three major influences - Sanskrit, Persian and English - which have, at different times and in varying degrees, affected Indian life and literature. Since most of the modern Indian languages are derived through certain intermediate stages from Sanskrit itself, it is not surprising that they bear a deep impress of Sanskrit on their features, constitution and complexion, any more than the fact that children are made in the image of their parents. The Persian influence came in the wake of the Mughal regime in India, when Persian became the court language and the language of the State. Among the writers in Indian languages of this period, there were not a few, who were eminent scholars of both Persian and Sanskrit.

But the English influence, which affected Indian life and literature gradually after the advent of the British in India, was by far the most revolutionary. It was an all-pervading influence which affected not only the literary, but also the educational, social, cultural, political and religious life of the entire nation in varying proportions. The Indian Renaissance, which followed, was the result of India's impact with the West through English. The other Western nations, like the Portuguese, Dutch, Dane and French, were there in India prior to or simultaneously with the English, but their influence on Indian life and literature is next to nothing, since their interests were principally commercial and partly political. The English too had their commercial and political interests in India, but they were not merely content with the commercial, political or economic exploitation of the country. They introduced the Western type of education in India, which opened out new horizons, presented
new ideas and ideals, which in their turn, inspired a spirit of revolt, resistance against old ideas and ideals in Indian life and literature, bringing in its wake a new social awareness and much religious ferment. These new ideas and ideals were Western in their origin, but their main channel was the English language and literature. The ideas of freedom and democracy, along with the dignity of man as man, human values, humanism and humanitarian approach, the love of liberty and the land, the respect for individuals and their individuality and the equality of sexes were the new concepts which came to be worked out in the different spheres of Indian life and were also reflected in its literature. A veritable Renaissance followed, which in course of time assumed almost the proportions of a huge tidal wave, sweeping over the entire length and breadth of the country.

This Indian Renaissance which was the result of the impact of the West on India through English was, perhaps, even more sweeping and powerful than the Renaissance in Europe. The Indian Renaissance was the fruit of a living contact of one race and culture with another spiritually and ideologically different from it. It may be a curious coincidence, but nonetheless a very striking one, that the Renaissance in India brought with it also a kind of Reformation, as it had done in Europe. The keynote of both these movements - Renaissance and Reformation - was to imbibe the new impulses from abroad, to subject all that was old and conventional to a severe rational analysis, accepting only that which was conducive to the health of the mind and the spirit and finally assimilating it with the finest and the noblest of India's own spiritual, cultural, philosophical and literary traditions. 'The Renaissance in India', says S.K. Chatterji, 'came through the contact with English literature and European culture from the early part of the nineteenth century, and from this time, we have a new orientation and
a totally new development of modern Indian literatures'. It is indeed very interesting to see that literatures in all the modern Indian languages had their Renaissance at almost the same time, that is, about the middle of the nineteenth century. English language and literature, and through it, the arts and sciences of the West, inspired new modes of expression and put new ideals before the Indian writers. Their approach to life and literature was revolutionized, resulting in a body of writing which was at once and easily distinguishable from the earlier and mediaeval moulds of thought, expression and approach.

This new development in modern Indian literatures reveals the fact that the Indian Renaissance not only manifested itself at almost the same time in all its languages, but also produced almost the same reactions and results in almost identical forms, thereby suggesting that it was a single, comprehensive, all-pervading, though many-sided, movement, which marks the beginning of the end of the old order. The focal point of this Renaissance was the year 1857, when the Universities of the Western type were established in India. University men studied Sanskrit and ancient Indian culture along with English and found in the East the correlative of the West. 'The Indian Renaissance, as it advanced, was seen to be not merely the child of an extraneous spell, but a revival and resurrection of the ancient spirit of the land. Sir William Jones and Rider and Goethe and Max Müller, who admired the Indian heritage and interpreted it to the West, made Indians realise the imperishable glory of their own heritage and infused into them the confidence that what the spirit of the land had accomplished once was a height to which they can rise again. They saw that what they admired as the priceless gift from the West was really a part of their own being, a temporarily paralysed limb of their own body.'

1. 'Literatures in Modern Indian Languages', p. 43.
The Indian Renaissance had, however, its two phases, the first of which was characterized by an impulsive admiration for everything Western, while its second was distinguished by a concerted effort at assimilating the best of both the East and the West. In Gujarat, the first phase of the Indian Renaissance saw the introduction of the Western type of education, growing sense of political stability and security, and the movement for many-sided social reform. Its second phase saw the birth of new poetry and prose, religious ferment and cultural assimilation.

An attempt is made in the following pages to outline, in their broad features, these movements with particular reference to Gujarat and subsequently, in the context of its literary background, to examine in detail the changes which came over the writing of Gujarati poetry since 1852, when Dalpatram and Harirad - the first two among the modern Gujarati poets - responded in varying degrees to the new impulses from the West, which gradually changed the very course of Gujarati poetry.