CHAPTER - I

INTRODUCTION
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It is generally accepted that creative writing in English by Indians had begun many years before Macaulay's Minute was endorsed in 1835 as government policy. Indian writing in English, therefore, may be said to have a history of a century and a half. With the increase in the number of creative writers in English, a term to refer to their writings and to them as a group became necessary. According to K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar, the term 'Indo-Anglian' was first used in 1883 to denote a volume of essays in English written by 'native students'. Iyengar adopted the term to refer to the Indian creative writers in English. V.K. Gokak, adding refinement, categorised Indian writing in English into five groups, and to one of them --- the books written by Indians in English --- he applied the term 'Indo-Anglian'. To describe another category the translations into English made by Indians from regional literatures --- he used the term 'Indo-English literature'. Yet, the term 'Indo-Anglian' is not universally accepted as a descriptive word for original creative writing in English.

2Ibid., p. 3.
Aaritjit Singh finds it 'less felicitous' than the word 'Indo-English', while Amalendu Bose finds it 'atrocious'. P. Lal prefers the expression 'Indian Writing in English', but Emmanuel Narendra Lall pleads for the acceptance of the term 'Indo-Anglian', as it can be used both as an adjective and as a substantive. All the three terms are now used freely to describe original creative writing in English by Indians, since the choice seems to be based on individual preferences. No one has been able to suggest a less monstrous or more acceptable or utilitarian expression.

The seminal questions that were raised when Indians first began writing in English still remain largely unanswered. So, the pioneering efforts of the early Indo-Anglian poets are interesting for the ambivalence they created. Henry L. Derosio, usually regarded as the first Indo-Anglian poet, was to some extent influenced by English poets, especially the Romantics. The volume of verse by Kashiprosad Ghose was


received favourably, though in a patronising sort of way. Michael Madhusudan Dutt, on the other hand, failed to win recognition for his two volumes of verse, even though he was regarded as a poet of considerable merit in his mother tongue. Realising, perhaps, that he would gain better recognition only in his mother tongue, he turned to Bengali. B.M. Malabari's poems broke new ground and the title of his book of verse—'The Indian Muse in English Garb'—suggests one perspective in the discussion of Indian verse in English.

Toru Dutt in her best work tried to reveal India to the West and for that reason, perhaps, her poetry is not wholly satisfying. Sarojini Naidu worked with limited success in grafting Indian imagery on English, but on the whole her poems present a stylised picture of India and are lush. The strength of her work lies in the fact that she wrote about what she intimately knew, eschewing altogether any traces of imitation. Aurobindo Ghose left behind a vast corpus of poetry which is deeply philosophical and awe-inspiring in its achievement. Doubtless, the mystic vision and the world-view expounded in his poems are extremely significant, but as a poet he does not appear to have commanded a great following and certainly not accepted as a model by the latter-day practitioners of the art.
About the time India attained Independence, a fresh look was taken at Indian Writing in English by a serious discussion of the basic questions: why should one write in English? When it is not the mother tongue --- or the acquired tongue --- of a vast majority, can it in any sense play the role of a creative medium? These questions were discussed threadbare and R. Parthasarathy made this predicament the theme of his poem, *Rough Passage*. However, Amritjit Singh argues that the notion that there is 'an inviolable congruity between the language and the culture it represents or expresses 'does not appear to be valid, and that the work of writers like Borges, Nabakov, Beckett and Rilke 'calls into question "the equation of a single pivot of language, of native deep-rootedness..." A more earthy answer was given by Kamala Das: 'Why not leave me alone, critics, friends...?' thereby implying that a poet's choice of the medium is purely personal. Important though this question is, a more interesting exercise would be to trace the forces that shaped Indo-Anglian poetry into what it is today.

8For a resume see Emmanuel Narendra Lall, *op. cit.*, pp 6-14.


Till Independence, a spirit of free assimilation of the revolutionary ideas in European art and literature permeated the poetic climate in India. As C.D. Narasimhaiah says:

There was wholesale --- uncritical --- acceptance of the tastes and fashions of the 19th Century English man. His concerns became our concerns --- It is possible that these literary fashions of the age suited our genius and temperament of the ethos to which we belonged. ¹¹

Although, after Independence, the poets of the Aurobindonian school, led by K.D. Sethna, continued their efforts, a group of younger poets declared their independence by openly revolting against the existing poetic modes. Finding Indian models inadequate and not worthy of emulation, they turned to the West for poetic techniques.¹² They not only approved but adopted the idea that their poetry, like that in the West, had to deal with concrete experience in concrete terms with the proviso


¹² C.D. Narasimhaiah, op. cit. 'And after (Independence) the poetry of T.S.Eliot, the criticism of I.A.Richards and F.R. Leavis soon became the rage .... Younger writers who wished to be different from their fathers read T.S.Eliot and Henry James, James Joyce and D.H.Lawrence avidly and wished to write like them, if they could'. p. 70.
that it must be related precisely and lucidly, avoiding any
purveying of philosophical ideas. They affirmed the neces-
sity of a private voice in poetry. This has now become more
or less the basic assumption of Indo-Anglian Poets. Rajeev
Taranath and Meena Belliappa point out that the introduction
to P. Lal and K. Raghavendra Rao's anthology

strikes a note of reaction against certain types
of verse written by the earlier writers in English
like Tovu Dutt, Aurobindo Ghose and Sarojini Naidu.
This awareness of a growing tradition of Indian
writing in English and of the necessity to relate
verse-writing to the needs of contemporary sensibi-
ity forms the distinctive feature of the new
writer. Indian writing of English verse is no
longer a stray, isolated effusion, but a purposeful
activity carried on with a sense of commitment to
the art. 14

The reference to tradition is probably justified, but even
with regard to the existence of tradition, there has not been
complete agreement. Margaret O' Donnell, the editor of An
Anthology of Commonwealth verse, says: 'There is a well-
established tradition of Indo-Anglian Poetry dating back fully

13 "Introduction," Modern Indo-Anglian Poetry, ed
P. Lal and K. Raghavendra Rao (New Delhi: Kavita, 1959), pp VI-VII.

14 Rajeev Taranath and Meena Belliappa, The Poetry of
a hundred and fifty years. This poetry is markedly different from anything found in other overseas countries of the commonwealth, based as it is upon India's ancient culture and religions.\textsuperscript{15} Striking a contrary note, Amalendu Bose affirms 'If Indian Poets today wish to write in English, they will ... find no tradition behind them, no tradition of Indian poetry in English ....'\textsuperscript{16} R.Parthasarathy also says: '... there is no perspective at all in which to evaluate the phenomenon of Indian verse in English today. Poets from Henry Derosio (1809-1831) to Aurobindo Ghose (1872-1950) are only of historical interest. They wrote like English poets and, as a result, failed to establish an indigenous tradition of writing in English'.\textsuperscript{17} Whether or not there is a tradition, contemporary Indian Poetry in English, in the words of Amalendu Bose, 'compares well ... with the poetry of quite a few of the current Indian languages' in both quality and quantity.\textsuperscript{18} It might also be said that this poetry compares well even with the English poetry in the West, if the publishing successes in the West of quite a few Indian poets are any indication.

\textsuperscript{16}Bose, op.cit. p. 105
\textsuperscript{17}Quoted by Narendra Lall, op cit, p. 5-6
\textsuperscript{18}Bose, op.cit., p. 105.
The post-Independence era brought into play a multiplicity of forces which queered the pitch for Indian writing in English. Chief among them is the politicising of education by which English lost the dominant place it once enjoyed in curricula as well as in society. Pritish Handy recounts the facts thus:

It was in the late fifties that Indian poets in English became self-conscious about their language and felt their position jeopardised ... In the fifties, the situation changed with the finalisation of Hindi as the national language and the exclusion of English from the languages of India. This was one of the main factors that brought Indian Poets in English closer to each other, to reaffirm their faith in English as a language that could play a creative role in literature ....

The 'coming closer' of the poets culminated in the manifesto which formed the Introduction to P. Lal and K. Raghavendra Rao's anthology, Modern Indo-Anglian Poetry. The reduction of the status of English also generated a two-fold reaction, vis. indigenous as well as English revivalism: on the one hand, people with traditional moorings expressing their preference for a fresh study of Indian classics and, on the other, those who thought that English could not be dispensed with, choosing

to go back to the study of English classics. Thus a feeling of community never really bound the intellectuals together and so they lost the sense of direction and moved in a haphazard manner, depending for the most part on personal preferences and tastes in charting a course. Those with traditional background failed to invest the past with a new relevance in the changed context, and those with pretensions to modernism looked upon the past as merely a burden that could well be shaken off. Having lost the sense of direction, the group as well as the Muse became disinherited. A sense of the past thus fails to inform the present. With the critics in whom radical relativism is the predominant quality failing to set up directions, the mapping out of a route has become, in creative writers, a matter of individual choice. Of the amorphous nature of the creative writing, D.V.K. Raghavacharyulu says: 'Although Indian writing in English has been accorded a special status and a distinctive identity, it has not yet experienced an organic crystallization of its creative moods and its expressive modes'.

The factor that complicates the creative, and judging, aspects of Indo-Anglian writings is that the writer, as well as the critic, does not live in a single literary matrix. Dual critical standards operate in the writing and in the appraisal. Narendra Lall believes (as does Homi Bhabha) that poetry is created as a consequence of the creative tension between two cultural and literary traditions. A true writer with genuine poetic concerns can only hope to strike a linguistic mean between these discordant—sometimes, perhaps, even opposing—viewpoints. Speaking about the present critical scene, C.D. Narasimhaiah points out:

Whatever our critical achievement in the past we have today neither theories, canons nor shared assumptions to which we can appeal for corroboration. We hardly have any standards of our own... so much of our work is almost always derivative...

and these words can also be applied to the poetic scene. The best that a poet can do in the situation is to adopt what Rajan calls 'the language of least compromise'. For, both

21 Narendra Lall, op. cit., p. 6.
23 B. Rajan.
as an expressive strategy and as a poetic necessity, a compromise seems called for in creative and expressive modes. At the same time, the resultant composition has to be less discomfitting to, and more truly reflective of, the poetic needs. Neither should it offend or appear to play down to the public to which it is intended. The language of least compromise is the one which expresses in a modern voice the writer's creative concerns without impairment to his sensibility or his cultural ethos.

The cultural setting that is the ambience of the Indian poet poses a concomitant problem. Time and again, there have been exhortations that an Indian poet should express Indian awareness in his poetry, if his work is to be distinctive. To define what Indian awareness is, however, rather difficult, but in its negative aspect this could well be a bogey raised on occasion to chastise what one, for various reasons, disapproves. If to assume that Indianness consists in writing about Koyals and lotuses were a naivete, then to suppose that it consists in writing about rituals and mystic practices is equally ingenuous. A couple of lines like

My mother only said:
Thank God it picked on me
and spared my children24

24Missim Erskiele, "Night of the Scorpion", The Exact Name (Calcutta: Writers Workshop, 1965), np
may be supposed to have described a typical Indian experience. But this alone does not make the piece a poem, since a poem derives its power from the human quality represented, from the description of a significant experience that is intellectually convincing and emotionally satisfying. T.D. Brunton, in an essay on Indian fiction, argues against the belief that a work can only be justified if it is Indian in some peculiar and essential fashion. He says that in literature such theories spell death and that this is a sterile tradition which blights even major talent.\(^{25}\) Particular situations and experiences, according to Brunton, objectified as archetypal forms become truly Indian because they would be free from 'fake profundity, orientalism and lush scene-painting'.\(^{26}\) In the words of Paul Verghese, 'The ideal poetry in English should be poetry, modern and then Indian - in that order.\(^{27}\) Therefore, to argue, as David Mc Cutchion did, that Indians writing in English should be free from 'alien norms' is to put unnecessary restrictions on the poet's freedom.\(^{28}\)

\(^{25}\) T.D. Brunton, "Indian Fiction: The Heritage of Indian-ness", *Critical Essays*, p. 200


\(^{28}\) David Mc Cutchion, "Must Indian Poetry in English always follow England?" *Critical Essays*, pp 164-180.
Although a poet cannot escape choosing subjects from his own immediate field of experience, he would not limit them to the narrow milieu from which they have been, in the first instance, extracted. Missim Ezekiel prays for the granting of 'the metaphor/to make it human good', 29 which tersely indicates the norm of validity in poetry, the Indo-Anglian variety included. The utterance in that case would become such a statement that would not be beyond the experiential level of the human kind. David Mc Cutchion himself, though he approves odd but competent verse which 'refuses to be bound by the nuances and associations of Englishman's English', 30 towards the end of the argument accepts that 'the chances ... for the emergence' of such an aberrant Indian poetry in English 'seem slight'. 31 It becomes clear then that poetry cannot be written in a provincial lingo which is not common enough and hence incomprehensible to the people that use the language. In the words of Paul Verghese:

That Indian Poetry in English should reflect Indianess is a desirable aim. But this aim should not be realised at the expense of poetic language ... nothing can more effectively damage

30David Mc Cutchion, op. cit., p. 49.
31Ibid., p. 57
the cause of poetry than some movement to harness poets to a narrow provincial idea of Indianess.\textsuperscript{32}

So it becomes obvious that in spirit and form, conformity to a contemporary pattern is a desirable aim. As A. Madhavan says: 'It stands to reason that a poem with a sense of audience must be cast in a diction and addressed in a tone of voice which is right for that audience'.\textsuperscript{33}

One of the ways of modern poetic expression has to do with the coming of a new era of high aesthetic self-consciousness and non-representationalism in which art turns from realism and humanistic representation towards style, technique and spatial form in pursuit of a deeper penetration of life'.\textsuperscript{34}

Thus in contemporary poetic mode a distinct movement towards aesthetic refinement and experimentalism might be seen. These, however, do not suggest only sophistication and novelty, as Bradbury and Mc Farlene noted: they also suggest 'bleakness, darkness, alienation, disintegration'.\textsuperscript{35} Essentially, then,


\textsuperscript{33} A. Madhavan, "For Whom Do We Write?" The Literary Criterion, 12, Nos. 2-3 (1976), p. 17.


\textsuperscript{35} Ibid., p. 26.
much of the poetry is a vehicle for expressing poet's acceptance or otherwise of a changed relation to established culture or of a new relationship in a different culture. In either case the tone of the poem denotes the trials undergone by the poet and certainly smack of an exile's attempts to adjust to the changed perspective of life.

This changed relationship of man to his surroundings has become symptomatic of man's quest for his self. It is related to the concern of the alienated individual in a "reified" world, of discovering one's self in the flux of time, of the will of spirit to triumph over matter. Allen Wheelis analyses the question of identity in these words:

Identity is a coherent sense of self. It depends upon the awareness that one's endeavours and one's life make sense, that they are meaningful in the context in which life is lived. It depends also upon stable values, and upon the conviction that one's actions and values are harmoniously related. It is a sense of wholeness, of integration, of knowing what is right and what is wrong and of being able to choose.

With the changing of the ways of life and avoiding of value systems, the experienced quality of life also changes. As the boundaries fade into indistinction, integration of personality becomes difficult and consequently a sense of loneliness is generated. In the words of George Luckthein:

> The problem of alienation is related to permanent human concerns which assert themselves with special force whenever a particular social and cultural integration fails to satisfy the elite of a given society. It may be viewed as the disintegration of traditional ways of life on the one hand and as a dichotomy of 'facts' and 'values'.

As a result, 'identity becomes harder to achieve and harder to maintain'. Erik H. Erikson explains the trial by pointing out that

> ... persistent (but sometimes mutually contradictory) infantile identifications are brought in line with urgent (and yet often tentative) new self-definitions and irreversible (and yet often unclear) role-choices. There ensues what we call the identity crisis.


38 Wheelis, p. 18.

Thus a man becomes more unsure of his convictions, loses his faith and believes that his work is only a meaningless part of the whole. A sense of futility of life sets in and a feeling of fatalism overtakes him. Will declines and, as Wheelis puts it, 'We have gained determinism and lost determination --- though these two things are neither coordinate nor incompatible'.

The Romantic quest for self was based on the belief that the self lives in a stream of inward experiences in the midst of subjective time. The Romantics attributed this alienation to increasing rationalisation and specialisation of life process. The notion of a "fall" from a perfect state is implicit in this. Wordsworth, in his *Immortality Ode*, expresses this anguish:

There was time, when meadow, grove, and stream,
The earth, and every common sight,
To me did seem
Apparel'd in celestial light,
The glory and the freshness of a dream.
It is not now as it hath been of yore;

In the poem *Nature and the Poet*, he says, 'The feeling of

Wheelis, p. 44.
my loss will ne'er be old' and declares that 'we are out of tune'. He feels that nothing can restore the power that is gone. Together with this idea, we also find in him 'the sense of man as intruder, and the association of this intrusion with guilt'.

In his poems, says David Perkins, 'one finds that he was seeking to ease a suffocating, almost panicky fear that man is doomed to isolation from the healthful influence of his natural surroundings'. He further states that the intrusion ... is more than physical. It involves the presence of human pain and guilt in the natural world. The same self-torment and scepticism are found in Donne. As Mario Prax observes, 'His cultural equipment was in many ways that of a Scholastic thinker ... whereas those medieval poets of Dante's Circle believed in the scientific and philosophical theories they accepted as the background of their verse, Donne living in an age of scientific revolution, could not help surveying with a skeptic's eye the state of confusion presented by the changing world'.

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42Perkins, p. 28.

43Ibid., p. 33

Reformation corroding Elizabethan faith, Copernicus and Galileo shattering the deception of stability of the world, provoke him to cry:

The sun is lost, and th' earth, and no man's wit Can well direct him where to look for it.

His subtle sense of the dissolution of physical and moral world ending up in corruptions to which human reason is but an inadequate antidote leads him to apprehension. The intricate verbal patterns he works out are indications of the conflict of his being. His burning zeal for faith and fulfilment in religion comes into conflict with his effort to come to terms with them from a rational and impersonal approach. Through 'Rime's vexation' he tries to 'allay' his own fierce spirit and tries to fetter them in verse.

At the beginning of this century, it was realised that the consciousness of the perceiver intrudes between the solid world of objects and the sensations caused by them. Thus reality become not something whose presence can be affirmed, but a kind of passage between states of perception. Chance is no more an exceptional condition in nature; it became the rule. Randomness became actual, and uncertainty a principle. The perception of reality has become a private matter and so
it can only be suggested rather than affirmed. Genuine experience, therefore, is a multiplicity of varied sensations. Eliot believed incoherent responses to life to be an appropriate description of experience. Personality becomes illusory and the quest for the self ends in schizophrenia. The quest itself becomes a progression from flux to stasis.

For an Indian poet writing in English, the problem, outlined in the foregoing discussion, is further aggravated by his choice writing in English, even though the choice itself is unconscious. Cohesion of sensibility is hardly possible when one is writing in an alien tongue. For R. Parthasarathy this linguistic dilemma affords an opportunity to affirm his personal disenchantment with the language of his adoption. Though English, as a language, could be mastered reasonably well, it should always remain foreign. He felt that English was doomed in India and to write in it was to cut oneself away from 'dream, from where really all poems begin, or ought to.'\(^45\) M. Sivaramakrishna notes that such relinquishing of roots attained its culmination earlier in Manmohan Ghose, but was recovered in the case of Michael Madhusudan Dutt.

Dutt discovered, according to him, 'one possible mode of recovering roots renouncing acquired "English" sensibility: bilingualism'. This conscious choice of Dutt's bilingualism, celebrated in a Bengali poem he wrote at Versailles, 'represents an unambiguous affirmation of native roots for transcending the exile', remarks M. Sivaramakrishna.

A. K. Ramanujan, on the other hand, seeks to resolve the crisis of self through the 'quest for a "relevant past"'. Ramanujan himself said that English and his disciplines provided the outer forms for his poetry, while his Indian background and his personal and professional preoccupations with Tamil, Kannada, the classics and the folklore give him his substance, his 'inner forms, images and symbols'.

The trial, then, in the case of R. Parthasarathy as well as A. K. Ramanujan is both linguistic and cultural. On the linguistic side, no true poetic utterance is possible, because of the fact that it cannot be expressed in a foreign


47 M. Sivaramakrishna, loc. cit.

48 M. Sivaramakrishna, p. 13.

49 R. Parthasarathy, ed. Ten Twentieth Century Indian poets (New Delhi, OUP, 1976), pp 95-96.
language, whatever the degree of mastery a poet has in it. Reduced to such terms, it seems as though that all poetic expression in English (by Indian Writers) is futile.

Secondly, because exile itself causes the cutting-off of roots and 'rootlessness cripples creative impulse', no sincere description of human experience in English is feasible.

The resolution of this two-fold tension, which is the cause of the crisis of self, takes two different directions in the poetry of *Amrita Prit当ies and R. Parthasarathy.