CHAPTER - V

SECULARIZATION OF THE RELIGIOUS IDIOM
A poet's apprenticeship to words and his innate talent for handling the theme in the light of his trained awareness of idiomatic nuances make for the sheer appeal his poetry has for the readers. It is worthwhile to concentrate on the language and especially the idiom employed by the poet to deepen and sublise his meaning.

Poetic expression of any religious thought and feeling inclines towards a conventional style and stylised language. Piety usually admits of a vocabulary that is ritualistic and strictly eclectic. But the propriety and tenability of religious thought being expressed in poetry are often called in question. Well known is Dr. Johnson's stricture that the poetic and the pietistic are incompatible and inaccommodative. He observes, "poetical devotion cannot often please ... Contemplative piety, or the intercourse between God and the human soul, cannot be poetical. Man admitted to implore the mercy of his creator and plead the merits of his Redeemer is already in a higher state than poetry can confer." T.S. Eliot, less fastidious than Dr. Johnson, has allotted religious poetry the status of
minor poetry. Andrew Marvell has shown the fundamental problem of religious poetry in that it is self-defeating because of the built-in imbalance between the fissures and failures in a poet's devotional relationship with God and the artistic success his work comes out to be. The rider of these observations, apart from the consideration of propriety, seems to point out that poetry, at base, is ill-fitted to be a vehicle for religious thought and emotion.

Again, it has been disputed for long whether poetry can employ ordinary language or not. There is a tendency to frown upon and even to spurn the idiomatic usage in poetry. Explicit and categorical is Addison's warning that a poet "should take particular care to guard himself against idiomatic ways of speaking." Equally powerful has been the tendency to uphold the plea for making use of the common idiom of the spoken language of an age. Gerard Manley Hopkins holds the view that the poetical language of an age should be "the current language heightened..." Nevertheless, idiomatic usage in poetry has come to stay and has been gaining increasing currency demonstrably for just reasons.

Of late, Indo-English poetry can be seen to be
becoming increasingly ironic and satiric in accordance with the dictates of the *zeitgeist*. As socio-economic problems keep knocking right on the head of the poet, it is downright hypocrisy to close one's eyes to living realities and isolate oneself in a vague sentimental indulgence in regressive nostalgia for the vanished glory of the past for its own sake. The antiquity of prayer poetry in India can be traced back to the Vedas. Risking over-simplification, the Vedas can be regarded as the bedrock of spiritual poetry and also the spring-head of terse expressions of the ethical desiderata needed to promote civilized life in a society.

The vitality, the relevance and the appositeness of the prayer mode are evidenced by its survival into the twentieth century despite some morphological variations. In the poems of many an Indo-English poet, it is still the popular mode embodying, resonating and conveying a wide variety of the poets' "intentions" while other sacred forms have disappeared or withered, or available only to a select few. In general, prayer poems are formulaic in that they are cast in specific forms. Often, they are rapturous outpourings of a devout soul celebrating the
glory and grandeur of a god in terms of a passionate lover pleading for the love and grace of his beloved. In doing so, the poet may be making a clean breast of his sins or wrongs or limitations or giving vent to his anguish or sorting out ways and means of earning divine grace. The prayer poems may also trace the course of working one's way through wicked frustrations, crippling lusts and searing worries to the sheet-anchor of durable faith in divine grace. Very often, they are cast in the form of an imaginary colloquy with God. In them, the speakers go through a whole series of moods such as picking a row with God, arraigning God's ways hotty, fondly embracing evil ways after arguing to oneself the apparent barrenness of virtuous living, rebelling against God and so on. They may end on a note of reconciliation with God's will. But in modern prayer poems, we do scarcely find the aura of traditional reverence or the eulogistic strain or even polemic of the soul with the Over-soul or God.

Such prayer poems in the traditional vein are loaded with a peculiar form of expression which may be conveniently labelled as religious idiom. For all the esoteric symbolism, the language of the Vedas itself is
noted to be "terse, knotted, virile, packed, and in its turns careful rather to follow the natural flight of thought in the mind than to achieve the smooth and careful constructions and clear transitions of a logical and rhetorical syntax." Nevertheless, the Vedas strike us as the "... luminously transparent... incarnate Word of God..." The Upanishads contain prayer poems composed in a chiselled style of ratiocinative accuracy. Only in the Ithihasas can the style of prayer poetry be said to have acquired many of the features of the elaborate formal literary style. But the prayer poems as composed by the saint-singers in the Indian vernaculars have come nearest to the colloquialisms, idiomatic expressions, cliches and jargons employed in the day-to-day business of life. They hit upon this as a means of driving home their message to the business and bosoms of common men. An instance, in point, is a prayer by Sivavakyar of the 7th century A.D.

With flowers of bush and creeper,
Tank flowers, and flowers from boughs,
Why deck you stones, and round them
Stand, paying mumbled vows?
Can idols speak, though in them
The omnipresent dwell?
Say, of the curry's flavour
Can the pot's ladle tell?

My thoughts are flowers and ashes,
In my breast's fane enshrined,

My breath too is there in it
A linga unconfined;

My senses, too, like incense
Rise, and like bright lamps shine,

There too my soul leaps ever
A dancing-god divine!

To Kasi, still to Kasi
Ye haste in foot-sore plight,

Although you go and bathe there
Will black be changed to white?

If, all allurements shunning,
Your senses be repressed,

The sacred wave of Kasi
Will well within your breast!

When, ah when
Shall thou, O Lord, bend as bow my mind
And like a string thereto, my senses bind

That all the amorous thoughts within my heart
To thee alone, by thee, impelled, may dart.

For all its directness and simplicity of diction
and sweet reasonableness of thought, it is strikingly
modern in spirit. In a tone of pointed and gentle raillery, it lays bare the shallowness of mere superficial and superstitious subscription to ritualistic modes of worship. It lays its finger on the raison d'être of an ideal prayer. In particular, we may note that the whole poem is an effective organisation of significant insights of the poet in a racy idiomatic style.

With the onset of agnosticism, mercenary civilisation and scientific temper, and with the advent of Western empiricism, the contemporary Indo-English prayer poems cannot afford to use the beaten religious idiom. By its very nature, religion exacts from its followers obedience to a given set of rites, awesome subscription to a code of spiritual tenets and implicit observance of ethical principles. Over the years, every religion evolves its own explicative brand of doctrinal treatises, tracts and works. In the process, that religion gives rise to a fund of specialised phraseology to describe or to connote acts and rites of worship and seminal philosophical ideas. Such religious phraseology or idiom becomes sanctified in usage and evokes in the users utmost respect and attention. The Vedas, the Upanishads, the Ithihasas, the philosophical
concepts of the founders and preachers of religious faith, the compositions of religious singers have broadcast certain terms which gain widest currency in the spoken and written language. In the modern Indo-English prayer poems, we do scarcely find the traditional aura of reverence to a God or exposition of pietistic virtues or explication of philosophical and ethical concepts. But the poets have appropriated the religious idiom to express their secular ideas in tune with the changed economic ethos of modern urban and industrial life. Commercialism, industrialism and a host of their attendant economic ills that plague the life of a common man impinge upon the poet's consciousness and colour his vision of life as embodied in his poems. In tune with the secularist wave of thought that was current at the time of the drawing up of the Constitution and its working out in political terms in the India of the year 1951, P.Lal has declared almost the poetic creed of an influential section of the poets in terms of a shift from "soul-stuff" and "spiritual" content to a pragmatic and painstaking art. Buttressing up his argument from P.Lal's virtual manifesto of new poetic creed, Shankar Mokashi Punekar builds up his view-point
that the secularist climate in India has displaced the
high-falutin "mysticism" and has ushered in the colloquial
irony of Eliot.

Though a consideration of the contemporary prayer
poems by Indo-English writers reveals them to be imbued
with the Vedic temper and Upanishadic thought, it is
obvious that the draping of poetic matter in traditional
costume is no more tenable. Quite daring and unconven­
tional use of the religious idioms in out-and-out secular
contexts has lent pungency and overtones of irony and
sarcasm to the prayer poems.

Missim Ezekiel's *The Egoist's Prayers* twists the
highly philosophic and religious context of the discourse
between Lord Krishna, the Divine Preceptor and Arjuna, the
archetypal mortal disciple in the Bhagavad Gita. In Ezekiel,
we have a strikingly remarkable instance of a lazy egoist
preaching to the Lord His duty towards him. In the poem,
we have the cool and callous drawl of the self-centred
egoist's petition of demands making hedonistic and epicurean
use of the idiom of detachment (Nishkamapravritti) emphasised
by Lord Krishna in the Bhagavadgita. Assuming a tone of
exhorting the Lord, the protagonist urges the Lord to put
him in right path. The overtones of parody are unmistakable
as the demands of the egoist smack of outright mockery and unabashed selfishness. The ironic reversal of the roles of the teacher and the disciple adds piquant urgency to the haggling idiom adopted by the hard-headed materialist that the egoist is.

The inveterate and incorrigible egoist adopts the tone of a tough bargainer with an air of devil-may-care attitude. The very second stanza employs the characteristic terms of drawing a balance sheet of trade.

The vices I've always had
I still have.
The virtues I've never had
I still do not have.
From this Human Way of Life
Who can rescue Man
If not his Maker?
Do thy duty, Lord.

He impudently stings the Lord to rescue him from the sinful sloth. Imitating the language of the Lord, the egoist pretends that he does not have any eye on the fruit of action. In the next breath, he strikes a bargain with the Lord to allow him to have a taste of the fruit of his action. He does not make any attempt at hiding his own lust for material enjoyment.
The egoist makes a heterodox request to the Lord to leave him out as the instrument of His purpose. He does not shrink away in humble awareness of his own unworthiness. On the other hand, he is proudly conscious of his own merit. He suggests to the Lord that he should choose from among the scores of his volunteers. In all casualness and levity, he concedes that he will carry out God's purpose as though he is doing God a mighty favour. Even this concessional offer is subject to a highly opportunistic demand on the part of the egoist to make the Divine Will coincide with his personal will.

You have plenty of volunteers to choose from, Lord.
Why pick on me, the selfish one?
O well, if you insist,
I'll do your will.
Please try to make it coincide with mine.

Casting off all the sophisticated argument of a clever bargainer, he comes out with his naked request to the Lord to grant him high income and smooth living. It is rendered proof against reverence.

Let me be, O Lord,
the Camel of the Higher Income Group
Who passes smoothly through the eye of that needle.

We may contrast this hard materialistic attitude with the highly selfless love of a devout speaker who is not prepared to sell the Lord at any price or with a person who indulges in a passing fit of loving impertinence in two different Vedic prayers.

I will not sell Thee

महे चन्द्र त्यो अद्वितिया परा शुभकाय डेयाम्।
न सहस्राय नायुताय वज्रिनो न शताय शतामघ ॥

Rig Veda VIII, 1-5;

(O God! I will not sell Thee for the highest price, Not for a thousand, nor for ten thousand, O Mighty One, Nor for an infinite amount, O Lord of countless wealth!)

Had I been Thou

चद्वे अमः स्याम् अहे त्ये त्ये ना घास्या अहम् ॥
स्युः सत्या इहासिषः ॥

Rig Veda VIII, 44.23

(If, O God! I were Thou and Thou wert I, Thy prayers should have their due fulfilment here)
Coming back from this innocent and unadulterated 
Vedic pietism to the egotist’s prayer, we see how in 
the end the subtle, hard and thoroughly business-like 
idiom of a haggler melts into a humble tone of total 
surrender and quiet request.

Confiscate my passport, Lord,  
I don’t want to go abroad.  
Let me find my song  
Where I belong.

In addition to exploiting parodic and ironic 
possibilities, the Indo-English poets derive satiric 
potentiality by secularizing the religious idiom in 
their prayer poems. Trained in the alien poetic tech­
niques, they have appropriated the Western poetic modes 
to embody their essentially native experience. In a 
tri-lingual poet like Ramanujan, we face a sensibility 
bearing the stamp of multi-pressures in the sense that 
his live westernised response to contemporary Indian 
realities is moulded by his innate sensitiveness to his 
native Tamil poetic tradition which in its turn has come 
to him through vernaculars from Sanskrit. For all his 
Western fashion of evaluating the gritty ash of cruel
realities in the contemporary Indian life, he is still at heart Indian nay Tamil in his response to a given situation or experience. The title and the first stanza of his 'Prayers to Lord Murugan' hold every promise of the composition being cast in the traditional mould of mere celebration of the traditional glory, excellence and grandeur of Lord Murugan. The tone of meek petition or customary eulogy peppe up with occasional jibe or accusational streak is soon abandoned and the prayer slides into anti-prayer. The poetic material is drawn from the traditional folklore, but the treatment carries all the defiant gesture of revolting against the tyranny of custom. In the age of science, emotion is suspect and simplistic faith is at a terrible discount.

In 'Prayers to Lord Murugan', the traditional key-note of petition is maintained throughout in a language that mimics one request or another. But the idiom adopted is essentially that of an urbane sensibility. The 'Prayers' is said to have arisen out of and embedded in the native Tamil tradition. Though he might have based his 'Prayers' on Nakkirar's *Tirumurukarrupstai*, written in the sixth century A.D., the content and style
of Ramanujan's poem are characterised by the dry intellectual idiom of a critical student of human civilization and a refined sensibility. The formulaic feature of addressing the Lord is kept up in each of the 11 stanzas of varying lengths. The poet constantly keeps an eye on the contemporary cruel realities of desiccated and devitalised human situation. Man has lost the zest, the gaiety and the glad animal spirits of tribal life. Contrasted with the life of pristine joys and gay festivities described in the literature of the past, the modern industrial and urban life presents a very deflating and even disheartening picture of lowered vitality, rank hypocrisy, dissembling and scratchy artistic response and a low-key practice of durable values. The chief concern of the poem seems to be to depict the chasm between the ideal past and the dreary present. The prayer is more concerned with the articulation of societal impulses than the individual ones.

The statements are brief and concise and a sense of rapidity is induced from the beginning. An overpowering anxiety to arrive at the crux of the problem propels the movement of the poem. The first stanza evokes the scenes
of customary festivities centring round Lord Murugan. The poet invites the Lord to dance with all the gusto of the virile motion along with the men and women of the tribes. The note of hilarity is soon replaced by a note of alarm at missing the scenes of the tribal festivities against a background of sylvan pomp. The language of the conventional praise is conspicuous by its absence. There is no attempt at highlighting the glory of the Lord. The poet employs a hard, gritty and colloquial style to suit his eager questioning, ironical jibes at the Lord's much-lauded virtues, intimate colloquy with the Lord reminding one of a chat with a friend, sly critical reflection on and indictment of a score of lacunae defacing the much-vaunted modern civilization.

The beauty of the prayers lies much in the bare austerity of the style and the terse idiomatic verve of the poet's verbal resources. Very admirably, the poet appropriates the traditional idiom to dress a modern idea. He compliments the Lord in quite human terms as the Lord who loved only one woman in spite of his facial plurality.

Twelve etched arrowheads for eyes and six unforeseen faces, and you were not embarrassed.
Unlike other gods
you found work
for every face,
and made
eyes at only one
woman.
And your arms
are like faces with proper
names.

There is no attempt at crying up virtues like enchanting beauty or miraculous prowess as found in the mythical versions. But the poet makes a bald and direct statement of the human weaknesses, deficiencies and problems followed by a mocking exposure of the stark truth of the Lord's failure to better the sad human lot. The traditional religious idiom of implicit faith is replaced by the contemporary secular idiom of sceptical realism. Clamour for utilitarian articles outweighs and ousts the traditional reverential, ritualistic articles. The idiom of barter in the supplication is too pronounced in the fourth stanza to need any expatiation.

Lord of great changes and small
cells: exchange our painted grey
pottery
for iron copper the leap of stone horses
our yellow grass and lily seed
for rams!
flesh and scarlet rice for the carnivals on rivers 0 dawn of nightmare virgins bring us

Your white-haired witches who wear three colours even in sleep.

In a quite deflating idiom, Ramanujan uses the image of can to describe heart as a store of base urges and mean yearnings for shady eminences, fake heroisms and shallow adventures. Dry staccato rhythms inform the fifth stanza in which the process of highly esoteric yogic exercise known as the 'Kundalini' or internalization of energies is secularized in terms of physiological activities in the human body. The idea is so parodied as to expose the hypocrisy of the material values, the craving for borrowed glory, the servility of the gallant shikaris for the sake of the material favours of the idle rich, the whole march of material civilization down to moon-travel as a farce. The human heart is imaged as a worm can to evoke the idea of man's yearning for the drossy trivia of the material comforts.

Lord of the spoor of the tigress,

Rajahs stand in photographs
over ninefoot silken tigresses
that sycophants have shot
Sleeping under country fens
hearts are worn cans
turning over continually
for the great shadows
of fish in the open
waters.
. . . . . . . . . . . . . . .
We purify and return
our urine
to the circling body
and burn our faeces
for fuel to reach the moon
through the sky behind
the navel.

Silly as the requests seem to be, they are expressed in cryptic language of a hard-headed realist intent on getting from the Lord all that is necessary for getting on with the day-to-day business of life. Pettiness of the things sought from the mighty Lord is only an ironic pointer to the dire necessity of these things conducive to lead a normal life.

Lord of headlines,
help us read
the small print.
Lord of the sixth sense,
give us back
our five senses.
It may be instructive to place the heart-image as worn can by the aide of a Vedic prayer where the devotee's heart is filled with unalloyed love for the God. The pure, limpid Vedic prayer is filled with lyrical vibrancy of quivering passion. There is no trace of poetic devices like irony, sarcasm or a spirited colloquy with God and yet it records sincerely the fevered heart of the speaker charged with the love of God.

Love-yearning for the Divine

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\text{रातृश्निः कृतते हृत्यु श्रीतयो}
\text{ञन्ती देवां पत्युः तिःः}
\text{म भूरि विनये अन्न्य पुरो}
\text{देवेषु मे अधि कामं अर्येसति}
\]

Rig Veda X 64-2

In my heart thoughts and feelings, agitate.
Love-yearnings proceed; they fly to all the regions.
No comforter exists other than These;
In the Gods are my highest longings fixed.

In the 'Prayers...', there is no evidence whatsoever of the aspiration for the liberation of the soul or what is popularly known as Moksha. The tough, sinewy, colloquial
idiom of the poem well reflects the pragmatic empiricism in the outlook of the speaker. In the place of exaggerated description of the Lord’s miraculous powers and grandeur, we find throughout the poem a consistent tone of puncturing the inflated aspects of the God’s glory. The eleventh and the concluding stanza strikes us as what can be called anti-climax of the traditional prayer.

Lord of answers, cure us at once of prayers.

In yet another set of prayer poems entitled ‘Bombay Prayers,’ Keki Demuwalla projects the prayers through the split-consciousness of a doctor, a snob and a desperate humanitarian. The doctor makes all sorts of petitions to the Lord to effect a wide range of preventive, punitive and terminative measures to wipe out the ugliness and misery in urban life wrought by the human greed and industrial filth. Here and there, he gets flashes of intuitive realization.

The idiom employed in the twelve stanzas is characteristically that of a doctor’s. Hence we do not find any rapturous outpouring of fulsome praise of God for the beauty
of his creation. The roads in Bombay throw up to the observer's sight very hideous and ugly scenes of the diseased and the handicapped. God is the author of all this woe of hunger and disease.

The street is the smithy of the Lord;

The snob of a doctor that he is, he turns away his eyes from "the lepers, the acid-scarred, the amputees,...". For a while, the doctor assumes superior airs and poses as though he is the God, the benefactor. He holds promise of vision to the blind and drink for the thirsty. The stand-offish tone of the snob soon takes on the personalised idiom of a God. The self-satisfied doctor admits frankly,

Lord! slowly, inexorably
I am adopting your vices.

He has contracted the vices of the Lord—a leer dressed in terms of a frank confession.

From this point onwards, the dramatic speaker has the guts to suggest to the Lord to try a series of desperate remedies on the humans afflicted with a host of debilities, debasements and self-made problems. Continuing in the professional idiom of a doctor, he renders a highly pathetic
version of the aesthetic dance of Lord Krishna with Gopikas. The dance, in the mythological context, is an act of union of the individual soul with the Cosmic soul in one fit of beatitude. The dance goes by the much hallowed phrase known as 'Rasa leela.' But the ugly modern phenomenon of sexual perversion on rampage goes under the name of mass rape. The petition to the Lord does not at all consist in asking him to inject doses of ethical rationalism to strengthen the moral fibre of man. It is also not intended to request the Lord to save the innocent. But he solicits the Lord to create a different species of human beings strong enough to bear the heavy weight-will of the Lord. He seeks of the Lord to make the new humans alien to pain and easily contented. He restricts his prayer to the Lord to strengthen only the biological sufficiency enabling the people to bear the pains and miseries of flesh that are as acute as those of the spirit.

If mass rape is what you want create some other species in your image, people in whose language there is no word for pain, people whose greeds are few and can be shovelled on the dunghill of fulfilment
And people with some strength, not a match-stick people, warped with rickets who cannot stand up to your heavy weight-will.

Thereafter, he requests the Lord to Match their need for you with your need for them.

This contractual reciprocity of mutual need is couched in the language of the commercial bargain and reminds us of the egoist's prudent and prim request to the Lord in 'The Egoist's Prayers' of Nissim Ezekiel.

Sunk in their own dirt, corruption and stink; people are said to have "snakepit hearts". The communal prayer unfolds the doctor's suggestions to the God to cause sterility and castration as remedial measures to cure the human beings of sickening misery. To heighten the sense of the sordid human misery, the speaker juxtaposes the image of Bombay as a moving sepulchre of the depraved and deformed human souls with the mythical hall of dead souls. In a vehement tone of urgent colloquial vulgarism, he urges the Lord to effect negative measures.
Lord, we are sick of ourselves!
For ten years let seed
stay clear of the womb.
Let one generation be sterile!
Castrate the buggers if you like.

To suggest to God to apply the veterinary method of sterilising the animals to the humans is the very antithesis of pious reverence. In a fit of total revulsion, he appeals to God thus.

Save us Lord! Save us from ourselves.

After all, the threat to man's well-being is man himself. The strain of a doctor's jargon is carried on to show the essentially bestial passions that corrupt man and to implore God to be indulgent to the human beings as the grand parents are to their grand children. There is no hint of stern reproof or total denial or complete abstinance. The worldly-wise golden mean is sought after.

Keep us from temptation
Yet not too far from it!

Let fruit hang inches above the navel,
within caressing distance.

The passionate instincts of human nature are neither shed off nor winked at. They are given their due.
Let fruit hang inches above the navel, within caressing distance, so that we can indulge our strength in resisting temptation and our weakness in surrendering to it.

There is throughout a tone of deflating mockery and an unwavering eye on the realities.

Leave us our daydreams Lord, even if we don't dream about you but dream instead of the things you have denied us!

The height of devastating mockery is seen when the doctor appropriates the anabolic and katabolic phases of cells to describe some sort of the waxing and waning of the soul of the human beings. In fact, every religion declares that the soul is inviolable, indestructible and eternal. The pooh-poohing is rendered in the idiom of cell-biology.

They too need a change Lord the cells of the soul a little dying, a little birth each day; so that the spirit, oscillates between the spawnbed and the death-bed, so that those who look at me are not looking at a pickle-jar.
Suicide, even instantaneous and bloody, is a means of expressing trust in God.

As far as trust is concerned
I don't lag behind.
I could trust you with sleeping tablets, knives, poison, even my revolver.

He abandons this intimate strain of jocular spirit at last and makes a statement describing the spiritual poise that one acquires when one's faith is total.

We trust you with lightning, as it is, and with the storm-cloud.
I wish I could say, Lord.
I am full of you like a storm-filled creek.

The prayer concludes significantly on a chastened note of humility and a deep wish for a chance of imbuing himself totally with God-consciousness.

I wish I could say, Lord.
I am full of you like a storm-filled creek.
But I can't.
Yet am I envious of those who can say it.
There are quite a few poems dealing with the theme of pilgrimage, an act of concrete expression of a pious emotion. They are worth our close study for they throw much light on the varied techniques of the Indo-English poets especially the idiomatic aspects of them. Ezekiel's 'Enterprise' traces faithfully the downward graph of the phases of experience of a group of pilgrims who discover at the place of pilgrimage a profound truth.

Home is where we have to gather grace.

Ezekiel uses throughout the sober and vivid idiom of a lynx-eyed reporter. The emphasis is more on the rapidly varying natures of the set of pilgrims than on the place itself. The high ardour at the beginning slowly gives way to the heat and passion of clashing temperaments and divisive tendencies. They part in groups and their enthusiasm dwindles and their arrival at the place of pilgrimage leaves them self-defeated. When they are at the destination, they stand empty and ignorant of their very purpose in undertaking the journey to the holy place.

When, finally, we reached the place,
We hardly knew why we were there.

The style is matter-of-fact, cool and dignified.
In his poem 'Pilgrimage to Badrinath', Keki Daruwalla goes straight to the heart of the whole matter about pilgrimage. The dictional resources are subtly exploited so that the whole organisation of the poem fully savours of the complex of dull aching pain of their journey and the fulfilment in their experience of elevating pleasure at the shrine of Badrinath. The evocative richness of the phrases and the tell-tale vocabulary make it a unique poem of its kind. The quintessence of the archetypal feeling of pilgrimage is distilled in the remarkable style of the poet. We have also to note well the effective evocation of the antiquity of the practice with its attendant physical inconveniences and sore discomforts and the final sheen of the sublime experience in the shrine.

Along the valley of the burning sun;
On flinty bridle-paths which centuries have trod in penance and anonymous dust,
the caravan of pain proceeds towards the Gods.

The "icy fangs" of the traditional description is changed into the picturesque modern equivalent of "the dentist's drill."

... The wind biting like a dentist's drill,
The point of exalting experience is yet to emerge out of the guise of a bundle of traditional and ostensible purposes.

What do they hope for ...?
Alms for anchorites, rice for ancestors and the prostrate darshan of amorphous stone?

The objective account of the progress of pilgrims gets on the eager tones of a highly realised spiritual experience. All the physical pain and torture of the hard journey begin to vanish the moment temple bells ring aloud. Each pilgrim enters a mystery and they are stated to have been initiated into a mystic experience in terms of a zoological expression.

... and as temple-bells cry out reverberant, each enters a mystery, and soon the soul-chrysalis opens ...

The traditional terms associated with the rites of worship and the religious and philosophical terms are all appropriated to describe the subtle and exalting states of devout experiences.

... dhoop with its smoke-tendril aspires upwards and the arti whirls into arabesques of flame.
Etch in the cinder-fall finds his small nirvana; flame-drops and icon-wash fall on eager palms; the heart in a moment's surrender to the God-feet swirls into concentrics of a motion beyond Dynamics.

The evolution of theme and the evaluation of experiences traced and described in 'Pilgrimage to Badrinath' are thus the exact opposites of those in Ezekiel's "Enterprise."

Arun Kolatkar's Jejuri is acclaimed as a modern classic. It dwells on an atheist's visit to the pilgrimage centre in Maharashtra and his return from the holy place to the railway station. Nowhere do we find any evidence of the stirring of mystical devotion or fervour. The cold gusts of scepticism and cynicism keep blowing throughout rendering the climate of the poem quite inimical to any expression of formal reverence and devotion. At the sight of a tourist's bus belching out a group of pilgrims, the priest's greed is excited.

Manohar, the protagonist and the chief visitor, strikes one as a product of the malaise of over-intellectuality and over-secularisation. The priest watches the road and sees it as barren of any sign of hope of monetary gift. The road is said to be winding like a curve of fortune
on the palm of a dead man. The priest

.... look(s) at the long road winding out of
sight
with the eventlessness
of the fortune line on a dead man's palm.

The familiar phrase of fortune line as compared with
the winding of the road is an instance of the satiric and
secular expression of the protagonist's idea of the priest's
disappointment. *Mantra* has been a highly esoteric spiritual
term used in religion to describe a set formulaic expression
of certain vital letters. It is widely believed that its
repetition by a devotee confers on him certain specific
benefits. In Sanskrit, its semantic definition goes thus.

मन्त्रान्तः लायते इति मन्तः

(That which saves us by meditation is called mantra)

*Mantra* is a highly significant term used in religion.
But the addict practice of the priest chewing betelnut is
described to be a mantra—a secularist mockery of a reli-
gious and sacred term.

The bit of betel nut
turning over and over on his tongue
is a mantra.
Manohar, the protagonist, happens to see a Maruti temple in ruins. Besides the stone God, it houses a bitch and her puppies. Nobody seems to be bothered about this ill-kept house of god. The visitor exploits the repetitive formula of the balladic refrain to express his own sarcastic disapproval of the neglected temple.

Maybe he likes a temple better this way.

In another section "The Door," the precariously hanging door evokes in the mind of the visitor reflections other than the pious. To him, the dangling door appears to be a martyr. The rough surface of the wooden door is said to be like "a flayed man of muscles who can not find/ his way back to an anatomy book."

'A Song for a Vaghya' shows how the godmen hang around the place as though they are part and parcel of it. The job of a Vaghya is to go round the holy place and collect oil for lighting the Khandoba temple. He carries a one-stringed instrument suited to sound a one-word song. Perhaps, nowhere in the poem do we come across such a powerful colloquial idiom with all its pithy accuracy and liveliness of expression as can be noticed here.
God is the word
and I know it backwards.

This is strongly reminiscent of the racy, colloquial style and the dramatic speech rhythms employed by the Metaphysicals. One is instantly reminded of the abrupt ending of Herbert's emblematic poem 'The Collar' which crowns a complex welter of turbulent feelings like anger, frustration, dejection and rebellion.

'Mee thoughts I heard one calling, Child!
And I reply'd, My Lord.'

'A song for a Vaghya' is written in the lively idiomatic style of a minstrelsy of the traditional past.

The visitor dwells more and more on the mundane profanities of the place traditionally held to be sacred. The Murlis are an institution of woman servants of God. They are supposed to dance on some important occasions. They are relics of the past surviving into the present by the sheer force of habit and custom. They are reduced to the position of prostitutes who want to see the colour of the money of an old lecher and who do "that bit of sacred cabaret act at his (the priest's) own house." The sanctity of the place is thus rendered ludicrous by the gross
The deft juxtapositions of the sacred and the secular, the divine and the mundane, the ancient and the modern make the temples and gods look anachronistic and even irrelevant impositions from a dead world of the now awry faith. The preservation of the gold gods in this grossly secular world is dramatically evoked in highly colloquial idiom expressive of the commercial and economic ethos.

broken glass is held together with bits and pieces of an old yellowed newspaper . . . . . . . . .
the cupboard is full of shelf upon shelf of gold gods in tidy rows
You can see the golden gods beyond the strips of stock exchange quotations they look out at you from behind slashed editorials and promises of eternal youth

In the last section entitled 'The Railway Station', Kolatkar achieves startling effects by making supple use of the sacred idiom to describe secular objects. The indi-

The young novice at the tea stall has taken a vow of silence. When you ask him a question, he exorcises you by sprinkling dishwater in your face and continues with his ablutions in the sink and certain ceremonies connected with the washing of cups and saucers.
The dog in the railway station has all the mystical air of a sage in meditation awaiting his ascension. The protagonist is all impatience to leave the place of pilgrimage and reach home. In that mood of anxiety and tension, he hallucinates to himself a mock-pious mood of being ready to make offerings to the things and persons of the railway station. He gets ready to do all the ceremonial rites of a typically pious pilgrim if only he could know when the next train comes. He undertakes a series of vows.

slaughter a goat before the clock
smash a coconut on the railway track
smear the indicator with the blood of a cock
bathe the station master in milk
and promise you will give
a solid gold toy train to the booking clerk
if only someone would tell you
when the next train is due

Secularization of the religious idiom has added much to the contemporary Indo-English prayer poems by imparting to them characteristic virility and tart flavour of the present-day experience. The ring of the traditional religious idioms is apt to be monotonous, dull and hollow. In attuning themselves to the bitter realities of contem-
porary industrial, commercial and economic ethos, the poets have done well by exploiting the resources of this poetic technique of using the sanctioned religious vocabulary in quite secular contexts. Their gains are sensitive fluency, purposive adequacy and functional accuracy in the area of their stylistic effectiveness.
REFERENCES


8. Ibid., p.107.