CHAPTER I

TRADITION IN INDO-ENGLISH POETRY: QUEST FOR IDENTITY
Towards the close of his stimulating essay 'Poetry, Myth and Reality', Philip Wheelwright has a key observation to make. He observes, "The poetry of our time ... is a last echo of something important that was alive long ago." Though his argument is myth-oriented and his view of poetry seems to sound undynamic in nature, his remark points out the basic fact of continuity in a particular poetic tradition down the ages despite the apparent changes in poetic devices bearing on the thematic, verbal, structural aspects from time to time.

Tradition, in the context of the creative writing of any country, may be taken to mean an unbroken set of poetic values, a pool of common references and a congeries of usable literary apparatus in one flow of prospective and retrospective interaction in the literature of that nation. It involves the inevitable and automatic operation of the historical sense of a writer conferring on his present work a contemporary validity and enriching it with an individuality in relation to the already existing whole of the past works of art.
Closely allied to the idea of tradition, the question of identity becomes relevant in the discussion of any literature born out of a new cultural milieu freed from the shackles of alien rule or the influence of alien civilization. According to B.C. Rajan, the two-fold aspects of the identity of an artist are creative self-realization and establishment of a collective myth or image or in other words contributing towards the declaration of a literary nationality. In his keynote address to a conference, Rajan observes that Indo-English writers are essentially products of two cultures and their quest for identity is inevitably informed by their mixed allegiances. He also refers to the oft-repeated charge that English, a foreign language, is inadequate and unsuitable for capturing the subtlest and the most vital nuances of "the inwardness of Indianness." It is also maintained that this inwardness of Indianness can be captured only by a living speech with its roots in the soil and in the organic past. This argument can be easily jeered at by branding it as a "snobbery of patriotic linguistic." This is only to swing to another extreme and to be guilty of smuggling political issues into purely literary matters. By now, to say this is to flog a dead
The truth of it is that Indian intelligentsia have been living in constant, conscious and alert exposure to Western thinking and Western literature especially the English literature. Naturally, they have acquired a fluent and sensitive command over the language of their erstwhile rulers. For, after all, habit is second nature. The reader, too, is not at all parochial in outlook but a broad-based Everyman. The Indian writer in English derives much benefit out of the co-presence of two cultures in him. He gains a saner basis on which there could originate the quest for identity. Rajan has put the matter in right perspective when he clarifies that the foremost point is that a writer's work is a unique inevitability and thus relegates nationality, identity and reader-criterion to secondary importance. The truth of literary practice in native Indian literatures is that they soar beyond the native bounds and aim at a creative virility by grafting the foreign literary techniques into their creative work in the native medium. When this is the case with the fellow-men of letters in India, the Indian writer in English can look upon English as a source of creative strength so long as he handles the alien language with a passionate
precision. The Indian tradition is very well known for its remarkable capacity for assimilation of the alien and unique power of synthesis. With this assimilative and synthetic faculty inherent in him, the Indian writer in English can come to terms with the new without any deep erosions in the fundamental character of his native tradition. Further, Rajan also pinpoints the issues at stake in Indian writing in English. According to him, the issues are "not merely those of sociological landscape but perhaps in that immemorial landscape of the heart. The clash is not simply between East and West ... but between the mores of a pre-urban civilization and one committed to drastic industrial growth."\(^3\)

The availability or otherwise of a usable and cognizable tradition in Indo-English literary scene has been the subject of much debate, argument, attack and hair-splitting analysis. On the one hand, there is a wholesale denial of a living and vital tradition worth the mention. Amalendu Bose represents this extreme view and he has categorically stated, "If Indian poets today wish to write in English, they will ... find no tradition behind them, no tradition of Indian poetry in English ..."\(^4\) To the same effect, a Bengali poet and critic by name
Buddhadev Bose has observed, "Indo-Anglian poetry is a blind alley, lined with curio shops, leading nowhere." Similarly, R. Parthasarathy declares that there is "no perspective at all in which to evaluate the phenomenon of Indian verse in English today. Poets from Henry De reservoir (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." Opposed to this view is the opinion of Homi Bhabha who points to a "tradition of English poetry written by Indians since the late 1860s." It does good to remember T.S. Eliot's note of regret expressed in the introductory paragraph of his essay 'Tradition and the Individual Talent.' There he observes that they "seldom speak of tradition" in English writing which has indeed registered a chequered history of nearly 600 years. T.S. Eliot elucidates the concepts of 'tradition' and 'individual talent' as late as 1920. When we bear this in mind, we see how premature it is to talk of a tradition in Indo-English writing which spans over as little a period as two hundred years. Further, there have been very keen controversies about the very propriety, legitimacy and integrity of Indian writers.
regarding their choice of English as the medium of their self-expression. Some doubt the authenticity of feeling and experience of the Indian Writers in English as the alien language is inevitably instinct with its own native associations. They even suggest that the Indian writers should exercise their talent in their own respective mother-tongues drawing upon the traditions in the Indian literatures. A little reflection will show to us that this criticism and suggestion are self-condemned and counter-productive. The criticism ignores the basic pliability and potentiality of any language, despite its strong native associations, to be an effective vehicle for the creative purposes of an alien writer. One can reasonably suspect that the suggestion to write in one's mother-tongue springs from an instinctive shrinking away from the alien out of mere prejudice and a tendency to seek shelter in obsessive insularity. This almost narcissistic tendency to be native makes a writer lose the prise of adventure and inter-cultural clash. Some others have done a little bit of motive-hunting and imputed the motives of fame and money to the Indian writers in English. But the truth of the whole matter is totally different from these partial views, partisan attacks and one-sided
True, the contemporary Indian writer in English has no recognizable tradition to fall back on or to rebel against due to a variety of historical, political, sociological and cultural reasons consequent on the British rule in India. Nevertheless, under the impact of the Western education and Western liberal thought, the Indian writers in English "could see that many of the conventions governing their social life had become rigid and petrified." It was then natural for the Indian writers in English to look up to the models of their English counterparts and even ape them to win a Western and Westernised audience. It has been widely admitted that the early Indian writers in English have made a distinctive and outstanding mark for their masterly handling of the alien language and poetic craft. We can cite a good number of instances of poets who have successfully recreated the Indian themes, landscape and people in the alien language. At the same time, it has to be conceded that the writings of these forerunners are inevitably coloured by their new-fangled fascination for the English language and literature. In effect, their works appear to be written under the close influence of their
British counterparts. It is but fair to note that the pioneers of Indo-Anglian poetry like Sri Aurobindo, Sarojini Naidu, Toru Dutt did not aim at consciously establishing an indigenous tradition nor did they profess at any time to do so. They, at least, showed the path for the Indian sensibility to exploit a rich fertile medium for self-expression and creative endeavour. The transcendental mystical poetry of a yogi like Sri Aurobindo, "the prosodic virtuosity" and "the exquisite vignettes of Indian life" in the poetry of Sarojini Naidu, the delicately lyrical beauty and the poignantly evocative power of Toru Dutt’s poetry are too fragmentary and diverse to compose a coherent line of a tradition rooted through and through in the native soil. Though they borrowed the technical devices heavily from the English writers, they did express their native experiences. Assessing the achievement of the early Indian writers in English, A.K.Srivastava and Smita Sinha observe as follows:

Their real forte as poets lay in giving expression to what they felt and thought and heard as Indians under an Indian sky, living and breathing India, into mystical and spiritual modes of feeling. They wilfully chose to imitate the English models; the blank verse,
the sonnet, the lyric, the ode and hoped to redeem their poetry by genuine poetic feeling, originality and imaginative reach.\textsuperscript{11}

Writing as they did under the shadow of the English masters, their Indianness is impaired by the limitations imposed by alien language and its native suggestions. As such, what happened was that "the originality of content is counterbalanced by imitativeness in form ... the echo-interference of imported models almost always stunted the growth and full maturity\textsuperscript{12} of their creative work. They had started, it must be admitted, a wholesome effort towards nativisation of the foreign language by infusing into it the blood of native content. With admirable competence and skill, they dealt with "Myth and lore and legend, feelings and emotions, so familiar to the Indians in the poetry of their vernaculars... in an alien tongue ... (and thus) the old themes became suddenly glamorised in English and enchanted everybody."\textsuperscript{13}

To seek for a clearly formulated and crystallised tradition in the Indian writing in English of the nineteenth century is only "to play with an abstraction."\textsuperscript{14} The forerunners, at their best, "stoked the embers of an untapped possibility and the glowing flames of Indo-Anglian poetry
today owe something to that initial impetus.15 There is, to be sure, a history of Indian creative writing in English in the nineteenth century. It is a history of jagged and irregular growth with "isolated efflorescence, some bright and enduring, some abortive."16 One can see that the political aspiration for freedom in India and her consequent struggle for independence are paralleled by the formation of a "nucleus of a tradition"17 in the field of creative writing in English by Indians. The political interest of the 1920s stirred in its turn a fresh and new interest in the cultural and religious heritage of India. The Indian writers in English have been slowly and steadily waking up to the need for freeing themselves from Western tutelage and mastery. Since 1947, the trend in writing has been in favour of turning to native roots and creating a tradition that is distinctly native and keeping in tune with the other literatures of Indian vernaculars. Gone are the days of equating the writing in English as an enslavement to a foreign tongue. To press English as the medium of creative expression into use is no longer regarded as alien. The Indian writers in English have sought to free themselves from the poetry of soul-stuff and conception
of poetry as "a spasmodic burst of (a) spasmodic emotion." There have rallied round P. Lal a band of young poets who have the unmistakable potential for breaking fresh grounds and forging ahead for the establishment of an indigenous tradition. In the fashion of crusaders, he and his band issued a literary credo intended to blow away the dead remnants of the out-moded poetic predilections and preoccupations of their predecessors. They have emerged almost in the fiery spirit of total revolution in order to usher in a stable and durable tradition native to the core and capable of reflecting their identity. In the heat of their iconoclastic seal, they have broken away from the "moribund metrical concept" along with "the clichés, archaisms and mere line-fillers." The liberated voices have come to be greeted as the "New Voices." They have gone even to the extent of scoffing at the old as a result of their almost heady impatience to emerge as the heralders of the indigenous tradition. Adil Jussawalla, for example, dismissed Savitri of Sri Aurobindo in a brusque remark that it is an interminable sari. In fact, Savitri is essentially a product of yogic vision.
The loud criticism that the earlier writers are led egregiously by the nose by their English counterparts is partly founded on the different mental make-up of the new poets and partly urged on by their self-conscious desire to disengage their attention from the lodestar of British poetry. There have been, in the recent past, a spate of anthologised editions, a boom of searching and sensitive critical studies, the anthologies often bearing bold assertions, clinical analyses, proclaimed poetic theories, discussions of the content, the critical postulates and precepts and a sharp discard of the old. All this goes to prove that "Indo-English poetry has found itself."\textsuperscript{20} In the 60s and 70s, British Mandy points out that Indo-English poetry is "firmly entrenched in the Indian literary scene."\textsuperscript{21} Further, he says in a vigorous and urgent tone that Indian writing in English must relate to the Indian literary scene.

Our roots lie here, this is our literature. So it must reflect our concerns, discover our root metaphors - rather than seek salvation under another sky, attempting to identify with the ambience of another culture, another milieu that inspired our predecessors to write pathetic elegies to springtime beside the Thames.
in the hope of finding readers and promoters
in distant climes.  

Indeed, the quest for roots and the resultant distinct identity have become the major preoccupations of many an Indo-English poet. R. Parthasarathy, himself a leading voice, has put forth eloquently and logically the need for the Indo-English poets, in the interests of their poetic integrity and sincerity, to work the allusions taken from the deposits of common "Indian tradition" into their works. Otherwise, they would risk a grave loss in terms of the erosion of sensibility. This, in turn, will alienate the writer from the native reader and estrange the reader from the work. Parthasarathy notes with great justification that the trend for the nativisation of Indo-English verse has already started with A.K. Ramanujan. No doubt, there have been at one and the same time, a keen desire to learn the craft of poetry from Eliot, Pound, Dylan Thomas and the over-mastering desire to give a durable expression to native concerns out and out Indian. This attempt has not resulted in any freakish monstrosity but wonderfully viable artistic wholes.
Parthasarathy is full of praise for Ramanujan who has mastered the typically Western ironic and terse expression to embody his recollections of the childhood and adult experiences in the Hindu joint family in particular and the Hindu Society and religion in general. Ramanujan's signal achievement consists in his successful assimilation of the anterior tradition whose roots are deep in the Tamil and Kannada literatures into the alien English language. He has stated that while English and his disciplines, linguistics and anthropology give him his outer forms, he derives his inner forms, images and symbols from Kannada and Tamil classics and folklore. Besides an impressive body of delicate and engaging poems, he has successfully translated some classics from Indian literatures. All this bears ample testimony to his rich genius composed of his sensitive knowledge of his native tradition and his competence to work in the foreign medium. His ambidextrous skill has drawn praise and critical attention to his volumes of verse and translations which include *The Interior Landscape* (1967), *Speaking of Siva* (1972) and *Hymns for the Drowning* (1981). To Parthasarathy, Ramanujan offers “the first indisputable
evidence of the validity of Indian English verse."24

In many important and vital respects, a host of Indo-English writers like Ramanujan, Dom Morens, Nissim Ezekiel owe a good deal to T.S. Eliot for their mode and technique. With his own distinctive poetic style, T.S. Eliot burst into the literary scene of England and shook it out of its complacency with his epoch-making concepts of "tradition" and "individual talent." In the first phase of his poetic career, he gave a powerful expression to the sense of sterility and frustration of the well-known enlivening values of life consequent on their erosion by the strange and monstrous forces of industrialism and the World War. He feels that the contemporary world is a waste land in the grip of utter loss of vital principles — a land utterly loveless, meaningless and hence spiritually empty. His Waste Land is hailed as a modern epic. It is a complex whole into which are worked a number of multi-disciplinary allusions, cross-cultural references, and echoes from European literatures. All this is achieved in contemporary colloquial speech and its living rhythms. Into it, he has even absorbed and integrated the prescriptive principles from the Brihada-
ranyaka Upanishad and Buddhism. Here is a striking example of the literary and philosophical values drawn from Sanskrit scriptures and worked into a typically English poem. It is a feat of originality and it points to the fact that no modern poet worth the name can afford to be doggedly native in his references. In fact, the tendency and character of poetry mostly seem to be not only to be true to the native tradition but also to seek out and absorb into itself the best and the suitable in the alien modes and techniques. The latter phase of T. S. Eliot's poetry is mainly spiritual in theme and also that of an Anglican Catholic. His poems have acquired the bare, austere style often attaining the incantatory music and thus approximating the sense of scriptural equivalence.

The poetic tribes, working hitherto in the relatively Indian local traditions, have become fellow-members of the international order of their own counterparts by virtue of their mastery of all the subtleties in the English techniques and style. The Indo-English poets, therefore, have also followed suit toughening, vitalising and enriching their own output in the process. While exploiting the possibilities of working in the alien
language and modes, the Indian writers in English have attempted quite successfully to nativise them by giving a durable expression to their sense of suffering, pain and anguish caused by the various ills afflicting the Indian society. More than one editor has been firmly approving of this trend in Indo-English poetry and highlighting the need for the poets to turn inwards into their own past and native inheritance.

Perhaps it is Parthasarathy who has made a compact plea that the Indian Writers in English should seek more and more in their native roots and nativise the alien English medium. His precept and practice go together. In his highly terse and severely wrought poem Rough Passage, he traces the graph of his travel to England in a fit of wild enthusiasm that England will be the Elysium for his poetic talent. Ironically enough, there he learns that he had

... spent his youth whoring after English Gods.
There is something to be said for exile:
You learn roots are deep
That language is a tree, loses colour under another sky.

Rough Passage, 'Exile'.
After returning home, he realises, in the spirit of a chastened prodigal son, that his tongue was in English chains and now turns to his native language and roots which he discovers to be in a decadent state and in stilted artificiality. In his poem, he intends to initiate a dialogue between himself and his Tamil past. He succeeds in acclimatising the English language to an indigenous tradition.

How long can foreign poets provide the staple of your lines?

Turn inward. Scrape the bottom of your past.

Rough Passage, 'Homecoming'

As a critic too, Parthasarathy has advocated the supreme need of the Indo-English writers to give expression to their own native culture in their poetry. He thinks rightly that acquaintance with one's own native literature and tradition will only open up and strengthen new possibilities for the Indian writers in English. In his pioneering essay 'Tradition and Freedom', he acclaims Ramanujan for his deft exploitation of the Kannada and Tamil past and blending it with the literary modes and techniques drawn from the West. Ramanujan's 'Prayers to
Lord Murugan is a finely wrought poem in which the whole traditional lore clustering round the popular deity Murugan, the many hallowed rites and the entire background of intense faith are subjected to the poet's deflating criticism and searching sarcasm of his sober and staid irony. As a result, the prayers are no longer an exercise in mere eulogistic and pietistic reflection in keeping with the customary practices obtaining in the long line of Indian spirituality. There is no trace of begging of the Lord any favour out of a whole stock of supplicatory inventory. The speaker is rational and sceptical throughout and also cynical at times. The poem is full of allusions to native Indian literary tradition and for that matter strongly the Tamil one. The whole panorama of its cultural, sociological, political and literary tradition is brought under the scrutiny of a detached and realistic eye and evolved sensibility. It starts on a vigorous note of nostalgic evocation of the erstwhile tribal observances, pastimes and rites. The dramatic speaker does not lose any time to gain his point of view a strong sense of urgency by striking the notes of ironic acuity and mocking acerbity of a cool realist.
The close of the poem can be viewed as some sort of ironic anti-climax. The speaker in the poem assumes a tone of earnest iconoclasm. The initial gay fervour of the traditional prayer wears away steadily and sharply. Having scrubbed out the detritus round the idealistic prayer mode by the brush of realistic evaluation, he hits on a very unconventional request to God to

cure us at once
of prayers.

The grandiose eloquence, the metrical punctiliousness, the prosodic exactitude that characterised the Indo-Anglian poetry of the earlier times have given way to a finely pared expression in which the modern angst is conveyed through the age-old prayer mode. Tradition has been cradling the invocatory prayers. Now the prayer poem has acquired a sophisticated form, structure and purpose. In 'Prayers to Lord Murugan', Ramanujan has effectively turned the customary invocatory prayer into an apt vehicle to convey the angst of the present-day urban problems.

There have been notable instances of the leading Indo-English writers taking to prayer mode increasingly. Nissim Ezekiel's 'The Egoist's Prayers', Keki N.Darrawalla's
'Bombay Prayers', A.K. Mehrotra's 'Bharatmata-A Prayer' are some of the finest examples of the supple use of the peculiarly traditional mode of prayer form for articulating certain of the secular concerns of the modern era. By this, they have forged a link with the Indian literary tradition and thus have not only joined the mainstream of the native tradition but also have succeeded in pressing the essentially conventional mode into use for the operation of their agile wit and intelligence. Marrying toughness and vivacity by using the colloquial speech, they remind us of the Metaphysical poets in English literature.

Another eminent poet who has helped Indo-English poetry come of age and acquire the intensely modern character is Missim Eskiiel. Born of a Jewish family, he belongs to an ethnic minority. At school, a shy, sensitive and withdrawn boy that he was, he was subjected to the slings of derision and hostility from the unsympathetic native boys. This studious "mugging Jew" goes abroad in search of a spiritual home and soon he comes back to India and chooses to settle there once for all. Though he shows traces of an alien to the cultural, religious
and spiritual traditions of India; he has made use of the Indian traditional ethos in an eminently intellectual fashion. His works bear the impress of inter-cultural tensions - born of his feeling of isolation and the humiliation of taunting by the natives. Yet, he has worked his intimate knowledge of the Indian classics of spiritual lore into the thematic motifs of many of his poems. Besides, he writes poems which derive from the typically day-to-day Indian life. His poems have drawn a lot from the world of Indian superstitions, faith, spiritualism, and social milieu. His 'Night of the Scorpion' breathes Indian through and through as he has evoked there a life-like picture of a slice of Indian rustic life. In it, he has evoked the whole scene of a mother quietly writhing in pain of the scorpion's sting, a swarm of sympathetic neighbours with their own stock explanations, the father's busy attempts to cure her of pain climaxing in the dramatic utterance of the noble mother's satisfaction. The poem impresses us by its contained raciness of style vividly projecting the villagers helplessly astir to save one in acute agony, the equally futile rationalistic stance of the husband and the patient mother who emerges as the pattern of the sweet motherliness.
Thank God the scorpion picked on me
and spared my children.

In another striking poem 'Entertainment', the poet exposes a typically Indian scene in the street. The monkey-show in a public place serves as a pivot round which the poem of reportage revolves. It reveals quite neatly the poverty of an Indian beggar-woman who entertains the crowd by making her pet monkeys perform the tricks. All the while she carries a baby whose cry brings the show to a halt. While the show is on

The circle thickens as the plot thickens,
children laugh, the untouchable women
smooth their hair . . . .

The cool accurate reporter is only one among the various lowly people like untouchables and coolies who have gathered at the monkey-show. Even as the amusement is writ large, the whole crowd starts melting away uneasily:

Anticipating time for payment,
the crowd dissolves.
Some, in shame, part
with the smallest coin they have
The show moves on.
Among the many excellences of this short, telling poem, it strikes us as an effective exposure at once of the poverty of the begging woman and the entertained crowd. The crowd enjoys the show but cannot afford to pay much to the entertainer.

Emekiel has published a good number of collections of his poems. The poems show him a painstaking artist who has won laurels for achieving a perfect integration of form and content. He deals with a wide variety of subjects like sex, love, superstition, middle-class life, urban life and the spiritual crisis of the city life. He points out how inadequate and ineffective the old values are in the context of the mechanical urban life. One is compelled to search for a durable truth in this dreary state of spiritual uncertainty and vacuity. In several of his poems, he reveals himself as one coming to grips with the problems of spirit in the increasingly mechanical and metropolitan life. Emekiel’s 'Hymns in Darkness', 'Latter-day Psalms', 'Poster Poems', 'The Egoist’s Prayers' are some prominent examples of this kind. Keki Daruwalla’s 'Bombay Prayers' is of similar import. Though belonging to a different order, Arun Kolatkar’s Jejuri stands out as a classic achievement in which the tradi-
tional sources of Marathi literature, culture and religious beliefs are adapted to suit the ironic vision of a sceptical intellectual. Against a backdrop of pilgrimage centre in Maharashtra, a modern youth called Manohar goes round the temple complex of Khandoba at Jejuri registering his cynical and sceptical impressions about the sacred and pious institutions of the place. His "irreverent odyssey" to the temple is the subject-matter of that classic Jejuri which shows very clearly that Kolatkar's roots are deep in the past of Marathi tradition. In him, we find the acme of secularization of the hallowed religious idiom. No more is poetic vocation a matter of cocky pride or a convenient means of money-making but a genuine creative endeavour into which the poets have put their heart and soul. Some of the major Indo-English poets have exploited the age-old prayer mode to voice their secular concerns. This links them up with the long line of tradition beginning from Vedic literature, continued in Upanishadic utterances and fostered in the literary compositions of saint-singers and men of letters in India. With a singular knack, they partake of the tradition and at the same time adapt it to suit their essentially twentieth-century concerns. As
such, the individual works have been quite ironic and satiric instead of merely toeing the line of the traditional and reverential attitudes.

Another major thematic motif that can be identified in the recent Indo-English poetry is the treatment of river as a black agent causing havoc and misery in human life. No doubt, river has formed the subject-matter of poetry since very ancient times. In the past, the river has been praised for its beauty, majesty and grandeur. In modern Indo-English poets like Ramanujan, Keki Daruwalla, Ezekiel, the river is looked upon as a pitiless destroyer in times of floods with the total focus on the human misery wrought by the much-loved river. In a pointed poem 'A River', Ramanujan lays his finger on the tragedy of a pregnant woman with twins perishing in the flooding Vaikai near Madurai. The river's wickedness is reckoned in terms of the loss of human lives. At the same time, he points out the cold indifference of the common folk and the conventional poets who go into raptures in praising the river in spate. This severely pared poem is permeated with the one ironic point that the so-called august river should be viewed from an entirely realistic point of view.
Nissim Ezekiel's 'The Truth About the Floods' is a found poem based on a newspaper report about the flood-hit areas in North Bihar and Orissa. In the poem, the reporter portrays the bureaucratic, the superficially altruistic and the apathetic attitudes of the officials, students and the victims themselves towards the tragedy that has overtaken them because of the floods. The relief measures of the officials do not mitigate the misery of the flood-victims a whit. The students visit one of the places and indulge in a mere show of service. Nothing more than an accurate description of the tragedy could be done. As such, the reporter leaves the flood-hit areas with only this confession of the helplessness of all in the face of Nature's fury.

The district authorities at Balasore admitted they had failed, but they claimed they could not have done better. Nature, they said, had conspired against them. 'Write the truth,' they said, 'in your report.' And so I did.
Keki Daruwalla has a bunch of poems about the hallowed city Varanasi located by the side of the sacred river Ganges. Besides, he has an excellent poem entitled 'The Ghaghra in Spate' which pictures the horrible scene of devastation wrought by the sudden and swift floods in the river Ghaghra. The bunch of poems about Varanasi and Ganga gain added importance when we reckon the fact that the river Ganga is deeply embedded in the memory of every pious Hindu as a purifier of sins. Since very ancient times, there has clustered round the river a mass of myths, legends, historical events and religious rites. Many a literary work has treated of Ganga as a vital and living presence moulding and unfolding the characters in the works. In the recent Indo-English novel The Serpent and the Rope, a classic; the river Ganga unfolds the growing spiritual conflict, crisis and resolution of the drama of the key impulses and ideas of the main characters. Hence, the river Ganga has figured in many literary works of India. To treat of the river Ganga as sacred and venerable is no longer tenable, as a fit and viable subject for a poet in an age of science and realism. The ugliness, the squalor, the stark presence of death—all go against the hallowed and chequered glory of the
city, Varanasi and the river Ganga. The personality of Ganga is shown in all its wild, grotesque and lurid horror.

The concept of the goddess baffles you - Ganga as mother, daughter, bride.
What plane of destiny have I arrived at Where corpse-fires and cooking-fires burn side by side?

One can surmise safely that the Indo-English poets tend towards the creation of a myth round the river.

Leading Indo-English poets have come to realise that the themes Indian are capable of effective treatment in the alien medium. Hence, they have been drawing very liberally from their native roots. And this phenomenon has endowed the Indian writing in English a distinct identity savouring fully the Indian cultural milieu, the contemporary angst and the deposits of their common culture. Time and again, the major Indian writers in English have been stimulating and contributing towards the creation of a distinct identity for their writings during the post-independence era. In his introduction to Stranger Time, British Nandy remarks thus:
There is a greater awareness that Indian writing must relate to the Indian literary scene. Our roots lie here; this is our literature. So it must reflect our concerns, discover our root metaphors - rather than seek salvation under another sky, attempting to identify with the ambience of another culture, another milieu that inspired our predecessors to write pathetic elegies to springtime besides the Thames in the hope of finding readers and promoters in distant climes.  25

So too, another leading poet Daruwalla observes that the new voices began to write about Indian reality since mid 50s. He credits Eskeiel, perhaps very rightly, for having brought into play a modern sensibility in confronting the confusion, bewilderment and disillusion of the times. He has effected "a clean break with the past."  26

In the works of major Indo-English poets like Ramanujan, Parthasarathy, Eskeiel, Daruwalla; we witness a pronounced tendency to derive the staple of their inspiration from the indigenous tradition. In the exercise of their individual talents trained in and tempered by the study of English poets, their awareness of indigenous tradition makes for the ironic keenness of their work.
While making room for the impact of contemporary milieu, they have at the same time managed to cohere their response to the native tradition. The Indo-English poetic activity, as can be seen from the next chapter onwards, shows itself striking roots in the native soil. The very themes, images, symbols and even at times the native colloquial expressions demonstrate that, at last, the identity of the Indo-English writers as one community of writers is established. Often by profession and practice, they seem to form a distinct fellowship animated by the very same community of ideas, socio-economic pressures. As a result, all the individual responses tend to forge, nurture and establish a distinct, identifiable tradition with its roots deep in the past.
REFERENCES


10. Ibid., p. 171.


12. Ibid., p. 110.

13. Ibid., p. 110.

15. Ibid.

16. Ibid.

17. Ibid.


24. Ibid., p. 51.
