CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION
Indian writing in English is now more than a hundred and fifty years old. It is only of late that it has acquired the status of an independent literature mainly due to the creative efforts of some writers in the country. The impact of English education on the Indian scholars might have urged them to express themselves in English. As Dr. M.K. Naik points out, "Indian English Literature began as an interesting by-product of an eventful encounter in the late eighteenth century between a vigorous and enterprising Britain and a stagnant and chaotic India. As a result of this encounter, as F.W. Bain puts it, 'India a withered trunk... suddenly shot out with foreign foliage.' One form this foliage took was that of original writing in English by Indians..." But surprisingly enough, eventhough the Indians have been writing in English as early the late eighteenth century, their writings were never considered as a part of English literature nor were they regarded as an independent literature. "The Indian's diffidence and the Englishman's indifference" were the obvious reasons for this plight. In his penetrating essay — "Contemporary Indo-English Literature: An Approach" — Amritjit Singh tackles this probl
and makes a very interesting observation:

"On the other hand, it is argued that if these writers are Indians their natural medium for expression should be the Indian Languages.

Or else, does the association of English with India for nearly 150 years qualify it as an Indian language though there is no evidence in India of a living tradition of spoken English that supports and nurtures the literature in English from, say, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and West Indies?"³

There is no doubt that "there is no evidence in India of a living tradition of spoken English." At the same time, nobody can deny the fact that the educated Indians use English for their intellectual expression. English is not a foreign language to us, as we speak of, say, French, German or Russian. English has been historically and psychologically implanted in our environments. "Anyone who still holds that English is a foreign language in India is clearly too diehard a person to be taken seriously."⁴ Moreover, it is the creative writer's prerogative to use a particular language for his expression. The choice of language on the part of the writer need not be a matter of polemics. A.K. Ramanujan has something very apt to say in this regard. "I just happen to write in English; it is for others to say whether it is any good or not... I don't think people who write have a choice in the matter."⁵ Therefore
any Indian who writes in English is as much an Indian writer as one writing in Hindi, Bengali, Kannada, Marathi etc. Hence, Indian writing in English is part of Indian literature.

As has been mentioned earlier, the Indian writing in English started as early as the latter part of the eighteenth century. The English educated Indians must have found the British culture superior to their own, as it always happens with the vanquished ones accepting the superiority of the victorious. The early writers might have written in English to show their loyalty to their British masters. At first their effort was to interpret the east to the west. But gradually the writers gained self-confidence and realized their potential. During the struggle for freedom, their creativity attained self-consciousness which was capable of converting the hearts of the Westernised Indians. The writers made it a point not only to study English but also to master it so as to use it as an Englishman would use it. Their love for and mastery over the English language did not make them turn a deaf ear to the call of the nation. Tagore, Aurobindo and many others had drunk deep at the 'English Springs', but after returning to India, they threw themselves in the struggle for freedom.

Another aspect, and, in fact, more important than the one mentioned above, of this writing was to create an awakening among the people. Writers like Nehru, Aurobindo and some others
were responsible for a cultural renaissance. The Indians were made to realise the rich cultural and historical heritage through the works like *The Discovery of India* and *Cultural Heritage of India*. These works infused in the people not only the love for the rich heritage of India but also a moral confidence in the struggle for freedom. Apart from awakening the people, the writings of these people exerted their influence in yet another important direction. They gave a new impetus to the writers in the native language. Perhaps this is the reason why there was an upsurge of nationalistic literature in almost all the Indian languages. Once India got freedom from the Britishers, the Britishers were thrown out of India, but no their language, literature and culture. For one reason or the other English continued to stay here. But when a language is used for creative purposes a writer faces a problem. Since sensibility is language unbedded in experience, a writer writin in English is confronted with a problem. English is not the language of our emotions and feelings; It is the language of our intellect.

But using a foreign language like English for poetry presents certain basic problems. We should first of all accept the fact that it is possible to write poetry in a language othe than one's own and also that writing poetry in a foreign language has certain advantages. Sanskrit, for example, was no a mother-tongue for many of our Sanskrit poets. When a poet
writes in a language which is not his own he tends to write in a more conscious way than when he writes in his own language.

Indian English poetry is now a little more than hundred and fifty years old. The earliest attempt was made by Henry Derozio, Kashiprasad Ghose and M.M. Dutt, Ranjanrain Dutt, S.C. Dutt and H.C. Dutt are some of the poets who belonged to the early 19th century. Their poetry was, in general, derivative, imitative of the English Romantic poetry. From 1857 - 1927 "the dawn grew into high noon of Indian English romanticism, producing some of its finest works like the lyrics of Toru Dutt and Sarojini Naidu and masterpieces like Gitanjali and Savitri." These poets, apart from their aesthetic preoccupations, had a patriotic purpose of introducing the elements of Indian culture to the West. The poetry of these poets "was at its best the voice of the contemporary Indian Time-spirit."7

Modern poets, on the other hand, wanted to create poetry based on Indian sensibility after assimilating the influence of modern English poetry. This awareness of a growing tradition of poetry and an eagerness to relate the verse-writing to the needs of a contemporary sensibility is what distinguishes the modern Indian poet from his predecessors. "An important characteristic of Indian verse in English in the mid twentieth century has been its emergence from the main stream of English literature and its appearance as part of Indian Literature. It
has been said that it is Indian in sensibility and content, and English in language. It is rooted in and stems from the Indian environment, and reflects its mores, often ironically. "There is a growth of refinement and sophistication which deserve a close study.

Nissim Ezekiel, R. Parthasarathy and A.K. Ramanujan are the three major Indian poets writing in English today. The refinement and sophistication in Ezekiel is due to a complete relation between the poet and the subject-matter of his poetry. There is always a distancing between the poet and his milieu. Detached observation has produced some of his best verse in poems like 'Bird Watchers', 'A Night of the Scorpion' or recentl in "Hymns of Darkness." The mode of perception cultivated by Ezekiel's poetry is the ironic mode which is a special product of the urban ethos. This is best seen in the poem "A Night of the Scorpion." The poem describes the scene of a mother bitten by a scorpion. The manner in which the poem describes thronging of the people, the remedies they try to alleviate the pain of the scorpion bite, the rituals they perform to ward off the evil effect etc., is both comic and serious. One gets the impression that the poet is the detached observer although trying his best to retain sympathy for the suggestings of the scorpion-bitten mother, but all the same depicting the efforts of the people the people with an amused look. The ironic mode in this poem is neither heavy nor cruel; but it is a perception tempered by
Scepticism. The balance between the rationalistic and superstitious, the constantly pouring rain and the constantly present evil is maintained perfectly. The ordinary event acquires the dignity of a ritual because the ordinary scorpion becomes a symbol of evil.

Ezekiel finds the ironic mode convenient because of his personal background as depicted in the poem 'Background Casually.' The last two stanzas of the poem present the personal conflict of the poet.

The Indian landscape sears my eyes.  
I have become a part of it  
To be observed by foreigners.  
They say that I am singular.  
Their letters overstate the case.  
I have made my commitments now.  
This is one to stay where I am,  
As others choose to give themselves  
In some remote and backward place.  
My backward place is where I am.  

His commitment to stay in India and the Indian landscape searing his eyes have an ironic relationship.

R. Parthasarathy and A.K. Ramanujan are living in foreign countries. The very fact that they are living far away from India has given them an advantageous position. Parthasarathy distances himself from Indian experience with self-pity, that he is an 'exile'. "Parthasarathy dwells upon
the question of language and identity and upon the inner conflict that arises from being brought up in two cultures.\textsuperscript{10}

The refinement in the poetry of Ramanujan owes much to the complex background of the poet. Ramanujan can freely borrow from Sanskrit, Tamil and Kannada poetry and the effective use of various techniques and imagery makes his poetry highly sophisticated and refined. "... his is an intellectual poetry controlled and ordered by his deep sensitivity to English words."\textsuperscript{11}

It has been customary to examine Indian poetry in English by using either historical methods or tools of critical evaluation. These methods are useful to a certain extent but they can be misleading while examining the poetry which is a product of bilingual sensibility and in some cases trilingual sensibility. Writing poetry out of such a complex sensibility has its difficulties as well as advantages. An Indian poet writing in English may find it difficult, if not impossible, to realise the 'inwardness' of the English language or may find it difficult to concretize the subtle nuances of his own Indian sensibility. We are told that Tagore's Gitanjali has not much of its significance in English translation because the significance of Tagore's poetry lies in the musicality of its poetic phrase. What is translated in some other language is only the meaning and not the significance of music, connotative shades of proverbs and idioms.
Apart from the difficulties of writing poetry in a language different from one's own it has certain advantages. A poet writing in a language different from his own, becomes conscious of his medium and this consciousness of one's craft has positive creative potentialities. A poet writing in English is naturally alienated from the primary feelings and emotions about the objects and events of this country. For example, a newly wed bride in India will not have severed relations with her parents and also with the village where she spent her childhood. This particular area of sensibility which yields to a rich expression in our regional languages cannot be expressed in English and even if it is expressed it cannot avoid the risk of being sentimental. There are many such areas of our sensibility to which English cannot have any access. In spite of this a poet writing in English can use this difficulty to his own advantage. This distance between him and the emotional life of the ordinary men and women gives him a freedom to use the ironic mode which is practically unknown to Indian poetics.

The real problem is not so much with our poetry, which, after all, is creative and therefore cannot lie, as it is with our criticism. We are accustomed to examine even the poetry in our regional languages with the view-point of western criticism and our criticism does not distinguish
between poetry in English and Indian poetry in English. Our aestheti
ic hierarchies are fixed and they change if there is any change in Westere Criticism. I am fully aware of the inevitability of these influences in modern times. I also know that when an Indian poet chooses to write in English, along with the language he also accepts the culture of that language. The situation is unavoidable. But the question is — What happens when the poet chooses English as the medium of expression? Could this choice suppress the sensibility of Indian culture? If it does not happen what is the result of the interanimation of two cultures? The poets of the first generation used English only as a medium for the propagation of Indian culture. But the contemporary poet uses English as a language of his thought and emotion. In that case we have to find out what happens when the two cultures encounter each other in the creative process.
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