CHAPTER II

INDIA : THE NATION IN VERSE

My backward place is where I am

(Nissim Erekiel)

As argued in the first chapter, Indian English poets from Henry Derozio onwards have had as part of their task the invention of the context that would give them a guilt and other complex free place in life. Some like Meena Alexander may claim the language itself on a self-reflexive context but it is so only because they feel exiled by a dead script, to use her own words.\(^1\) This feeling of exile is what they contend with even where their language itself is their landscape, and they chisel out their personal space, as India that they inhabit. This India is as much for public consumption and approval as for individual self-assertion:

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 over state the case.

I have made my commitment 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.

(.Ezekiel, “Background Casually”)
This not so casual attestation of commitment to India, this need to do something for one's given and chosen land, is seen in the very first Indian English poet of note as he sings to his native land:

My country! in thy day of glory past  
A beauteous halo circled round thy brow,  
And worshipped as a deity thou wast,  
Where is that glory, where that reverence now?  
(Derozio, "My Native Land")

Derozio's India is "grovelling in the lowly dust" but the poet will give himself to the task of restoring some pride in his "fallen country" - all for "One kind wish from thee" All he asks for is to belong, to be looked at kindly by India, to be seen and recognised as an Indian poet. He sees himself as a successor to earlier Indian poets, much worthier than him, and it is his task to resurrect Indian poetry and India which is now.

Neglected, mute, and devaluate...  
Like ruined monument on desert plain  
("The Harp of India").

This India under foreign yoke, bound, and gagged ("Silence has bound thee with her fatal chain") has to be given her voice again, has to be awakened, if only by this Indian English poet:

but if thy notes divine  
May be by mortal wakened once again,  
Harp of my country, let me strike the strain².  
(Derozio, 'The Harp of India')

M.K. Naik finds as a "noteworthy feature of Derozio's poetry... its burning nationalistic zeal, somewhat surprising in a Eurasian at a time when the average representative of his class was prone to repudiate his
Indian blood and identify himself with the white man, for eminently practical reasons”. He feels that Derozio’s poems “have an unmistakable authenticity of patriotic utterance which stamps Derozio as an Indian English poet who is truly a son of the soil.”

The India that the early poets live in is a country which has been colonised, a country which has only a past glory to look back to:

If then amidst thy sons a fallen race,
Alas! degraded low (unhappy days!)
I a poor schoolboy with my scantystore,
Unleavned in thy mysterious shastras love,
On painted wings of fancy strive to soar,
And hail thee, India, from thy days of yore,
Then welcome to my breast, forever dear,
While on thy sad remains I drop a tear,
And tho’ I’m born in this unlucky age,
Without the fire of any ancient sage,
Accept the tribute of a heart sincere.

(Gooroo Churn Dutt “Introductory Lives”)

Freedom and glories are both past a past - and the past has to be written about to resurrect a weakened land. In their bid to restore lost pride almost all early Indian poets reverted to historical and ancient themes - always with a lesson in mind. Michael Madhusudan, Dutt’s, “King Porus” ends with a section on India’s fall and loss of freedom:

But where, oh! where is Porus now?
And where the noble hearts that bled
For freedom...

... and where art thou Fair Freedom! thou
Once goddess of Ind’s sunny clime!
Waves of conquests have laid Dutt’s India low:

The crown that once did deck thy brow
It’s trampled down - and thou sunk low:
Thy pearl, thy diamond and thy mine
Of glistening gold is no more thine.
Alas! - each conquering tyrant’s lust
Has robb’d thee of thy very dust!
Thou standest like a lofty tree
Shorn of fruits - blossoms - leaves and all
Of every gale the sport to be,
Despised and scorned c’en in thy fall!
(M.M. Dutt, “King Porus”)

It takes an optimist like Shoshee Chunder Dutt, who did after all write a novel titled The Republic of Orissa, to write a poem, a sonnet, on India free in the future, where he says:

I dreamt a dream of strange and wild delight,
Freedom’s pure shrine once more I illumined did seem,
The clouds had pass’d beneath the morning light,
On beauty’s cheeks I mark’d the tear drops dry,
And sighs and groans forever fled the land,
Science again aspired to the sky
(S.C. Dutt, “India”)

But it is only a dream - the present in filled with despair as S.C. Dutt frets:

Why should a dream it be?
Land of my fathers! Cans’t thou ne’er be free?

It is of more than passing interest that S.C. Dutt in one line challenges the entire edifice of colonial education when he says that in his vision of free India “science again aspired to the sky”. The scientific temper that the English were supposedly imparting to Indians is dismissed as an accoutrement of bondage and a factor in continuing exploitation.
S.C. Dutt’s hopes live in other hearts as well. Hur Chunder Dutt in his sonnet to India too sees “broad streaks of a still brighter day” than the bright days of India’s glorious past (“Thy days of glory memory recalls”). But these are visions of the past and the future, the present is where the poet lives and writes in order to:

in poor lays thy widowed fate deplore,
Thy trophies gone, thy beauteous laurels torn
(H.C. Dutt “India”)

This sense of loss and subjugation causes the early Indian English poets to turn their gaze to a glorious past - an India of martial valour, wisdom, wealth, and freedom. Not so curiously, the poets, regardless of conversions to Christianity, look back to the Hindu past, a time before Muslim rule which is seen as another foreign subjugation, and then the resistances to the Muslims. This could be and perhaps is a manifestation of “displaced hostility against the colonial power” as Nandy notes. But they also read a disjunction is the history of India - which is now seen as a distinctly Hindu India with a glorious past before Muslim conquest. They are not interested so much in the decline and fall of this India and reasons thereof (except “foreign” conquest) as in a recreation and restoration of the past glory. The fall of this wonder that was India is a given; what the poets are interested in is the sense of dignity and pride that this history gives them.

This motivates Michael Madhusudan Dutt’s epic The Captive Ladie, which tells the story of the King of Delhi and Kanauj and the
attack by Mohammed of Ghazni. It is also for this reason that Michael Madhusudan Dutt writes of King Porus:

King Porus, towering midst the foe,
Like a Himala-peak
With its eternal crown of snow,
And on his brow did shine
The jewel’d regal diadem.

The enemies come in stealthily in the night while

Ind! Thy unsuspecting sons
Did heedless slumber

but they didn’t know the valour of King Porus and his upright army. In the morning the kingdom’s

glorious flag,
To which the world in awe once bow’d,
There is defiance waved
On India’s gales - triumphant - proud!
Then, rose the dreadful yell, -
Then lion-like, each warrior brave.
Rushed on the coming foe,
To strike for freedom - or the grave!

King Porus’s kingdom becomes India and an attack on this kingdom is a threat to all liberty. The poem begins with:

Loudly the midnight tempest sang,
Ah! it was thy dirge, fair liberty,

King Porus and his army fight for India’s freedom:

‘fore the Macedonians dirven,
Fell India’s hardy sons, -
Proud mountain oaks by thunders riven,
That for their country’s freedom bled -
And made on gore their glorious bed!
Porus lost of course but won his adversary's admiration by his bravery as well as his dignity and pride:

    King Porus was no slave,
    He stooped not bent not there his knee,-
    But stood, as stands an oak,
    In Himalayan majesty.

Porus desires to be treated as a king and is termed "Ind's haughty son" and when the conqueror releases him "India's crown was lost and won". Having talked of the past Dutt expresses his real reason for a poem on the subject:

    But where, oh! where is Porus now?
    and where the noble hearts that bled
    For freedom - with the heroic glow
    In patriot bosoms nourished -
    - Hearts, eagle-like that recked not death,
    but shrank before foul Thraldom’s Breath?

India has lost "Fair Freedom" who was "Once goddess of Ind's sunny clime!" In this state every valorous king from ancient times is an Indian king, every kingdom India.

Shoshee Chunder Dutt in his "My Native Land" confines himself to the loss of Indian glory to early "foreign" rules, without any overt allusion to the British rule:

    My fallen country! where abide
    Thy envied splendour and thy glory now?
    The Pathan's and the Mughul's pride,
    Spread desolation far and wide
    And stain'd thy sinless brow.

    In freedom's shrine, the slave alone
    Now dwells - a lasting monument of the shame!
The mighty and the brave are gone,  
thy hallowed triumphs overthrown -  
The tropies of their fame!

But he "cannot choose but love" his India whose "sun hath for ever set".  
In his sonnet "India" where he dreams, of India's past glory he does wake  
up to the harsh reality of the India of his days.

Her children - hands with fetter mean are bound.  
And none, alas! to loose those letters dare

As he bemoans "the recreant slave" who "servile hugs the despot’s  
loathsome chain". It is no wonder that he looks for Hindu heroes to write  
about. Shoshee Chunder Dutt writes of Shivaji’s "haughty reception in the  
court of Aurangzebe, confinement, flight and eternal enmity." Shoshee  
Chunder Dutt’s "Sivajee" depicts the Moghul emperor, Aurangzeb, as a  
tyrant" who sits alone "towering in the pomp of power." Shivaji, the  
Maratha chieftain, on the other hand is "valiant" with a "stubborn heart",  
Shivaji’s "bosom" is "plough’d" with manly scars.

The records of his fame and he is prone to "a warrior’s wrath". His  
"passions dark" show us his "lofty soul", when he stands "aloof-alone"  
his pride is seen in contrast to the tyrant’s haughtiness. The last four  
stanzas of this ten-stanza poem celebrate Shivaji’s "works of death", his  
"blood-red-sword", and the carnage that "he’ll lead." Shivaji is seen as  
the "dead avenger" who will frighten the tyrant, "the scorners", to "wish  
he had never stirr’d/That haughty soul’s dark ire."
It is in the same spirit that Hur Chunder Dutt celebrates the valourand spirit of Tarra Baee who wished to rescue Thoda from the clutches of Lilla the Afghan and declared her intention to marry the man:

who foremost scales  
The ramparts of the foe,  
And to the wicked Lilla deals  
The dread avenging blows  
(“Tarra Baee”)

And it is a similar motivation that results in Greece Chunder Dutt’s “Samarsi”, Samarsi

is the pride of his clan,  
But he owns not an acre in broad Rajasthan.

He is “the hope of the true” through “his henchmen are far”. Samarsi has been isolated and impoverished because  

the Moors o’er the Jumna in triumph have come,  
And Samarsi the bold is an exile from home.

Samarsi’s land is now ruled by “the Moors” - the usurper is identified by religion:  

the Moslem now feasts in his hall and his bower.  
And the crescent flag flutters from temple and tower.

But the usurper cannot tame “Samarsi the bold” who

is as marry as when  
His will was the law in his loved native glen.
Samarsi may be declared an outlaw but the true heir to the kingdom “has homage from high and from low”. The Moor, the Muslims, can never have the hearts of the peoples, can never overturn the natural law:

“For the roebuck still bounds by the dark haunted lake,
And the partridge still springs from the deep tangled brake,
And the perch and the salmon in silv’ry shoals glean,
At morning and noontiche in pool and in stream
And spite of their wonders on hill and on plain
Samarsi can harry his father’s domain.

Thus foreign - here Muslim - conquest is seen as “unnatural”, a state of affairs that cannot but be unstable and temporary. Hindu valour and rights are seen as natural and inviolable.

Another early poet Malabari, though he appreciates the efforts of the British including the missionaries (except “proselytization”)\(^5\), or because he does so, bewails the passing of the virtues of Indian character in “Where Indeed?”:

India, thus her frame o’er-shading,
Steeps herself in misery -
While her glorious past is fading,
From fair Hist’ry’s memory.

He protests against English injustices (see “A Protest” when he writes against an Englishman who kicked his servant to death) but he also feels that to be ruled by the British is better than the earlier Muslim rule:

Oh mourn thou not vain regrets,
That fanci’d wrongs thy peace alloys...
What if thy English brother lords
It o’er thee with contempt impli’d?
Recall the day when Moslem swords
Cut thee and thine in wanton pride.
He mayspeak of the personal sacrifice the British have made in coming out to India and his eyes many overflow with "hot tears of shame" and "grateful pity" but he does dream in "The Dream of Youth" of India as a cradle "high/With rich surroundings free,/ Its head protected by/The’'ethereal canopy'. the dream extends in the footnote to have "in God’s good time" our own "Indian parliament with Indian legislative and executive officers".

Thus from Derozio onwards Indian English poet in an effort to assert their Indianness and their pride in being Indian use "Indian imagery, Indian mythology and Indian themes and sentiments". Naik points out that Derozio is "a pioneer in the use of Indian myth and legend, imagery and diction". In Franz Fanon’s delineation the attempts of the early Indian English poets would conform to the second of the three stages of assimilation, disturbance and revolution. In this stage:

The native is disturbed, he decides to remember what he is Past happenings of the bye-gone days of his childhood will be brought up out of the depths of his memory; old legends will be reinterpreted in the light of a borrowed estheticism and of a conception of the world which was discovered under other skies. Fanon’s interpretation is too schematic and hence simplistic but is useful in order to problematize the accusation of orientalism quite easily hurled at the early poets.

In their project(s) to construct their India(s) they may tread on slippery ground. Verghese feels that "Derozio’s handling of Indian classical mythology is often uncertain." He notices a certain "wavering
attitude towards the Indian myth and its poetic use.” Naik sees this as an attempt to move away from the mere echoing to find the true voice - to articulate an Indian sensibility in English poetry - and he points out that “The most obvious (and the most elementary) form authenticity has taken is the choice of specifically Indian themes, setting and frame of reference”. He then cautions that “the mere choice of an Indian theme or setting does not ipso facto make for authenticity. Daubing on local colour an inch thick can be no substitute for the healthy pink living flesh…”

“Authenticity” is a curious term, and an often used term in the criticism of Indian English poetry. This term assumes that there is a certain “true” Indian sensibility which has to characterise any Indian English poet and his/her expression. Its other assumption is thus that true Indianness is not an attribute of all Indians and their experiences and interactions - on the contrary, the Indian English poet has to consciously work at making himself Indian in thought, deed, and sensibility! Thus this criterion becomes not an explanatory term but a prescriptive one in the criticism of Indian English poetry. As we have seen, Vilas Sarang who seems to dismiss the concept of Indianness as “a red herring” decides “to go after it nevertheless.” But he does feel that “Indianness is not merely a question of the material of poetry, or even of sensibility; it is tied up with the factor called the audience”. In Sarang’s view Indian English poets have an inevitable western audience and hence “cannot help using their Indianness at least some of the time, in some way, to a greater or lesser extent”. This, according to him, is the reason “why the naive, simplistic way in which pre-Independence poets tried to be ‘Indian’ was
not immediately or totally abandoned after Indian English poets became modern and sophisticated.\(^ {11}\) There is much to argue with this in this statement but what is of immediate interest is that Sarang has so far used “Indianness” to explain aspects of Indian English poetry. He points out that Ezekiel, and Ramanujan, and Parthasarathy, all tend to use Indian images to exoticise their poetry. This is a trap all Indian English poet fall into, Sarang feels. He counsels the Indian English poet to enrich the “material that may have come to him for extra-poetic reasons, and not be content with a decorative use of Indian imagery”\(^ {12}\). But Sarang then moves on to “the level of sensibility” and is forced to concede that there is “some truth in the belief that an Indian English poet, by expressing an Indian sensibility, will speak more authentically, and achieve greater depth and possibly greatness, than by assuming a cosmopolitan stance.”\(^ {13}\) This after saying that any attempt to define “Indian sensibility leads one no farther than to some cliched generalisations.”\(^ {14}\) After his initial prescription to Indian English poets to be authentically Indian in sensibility, the poet in Sarang reasserts himself and ends with this eminently sensible statement:

Let the poet be himself, by being himself, the poet, in fact, contributes to the definition of Indianness, for Indianness can only be defined, after all in terms of what Indians are.

R. Parthasarathy too, in the introduction to his anthology notes that “Any evaluation of Indian verse in English is usually bedevilled by the question of national identity.”\(^ {15}\) He is not surprised “that writers in English are conscious of their Indianness because, at the bottom of it all,
one suspects a crisis of identity.” Parathasarathy observes that Indian English poets are “preoccupied” with the question of national identity because any “Indian who uses the English language feels, to some extent, alienated.” But contemporary poets confront this by writing about that environment, their situations, “in striking contrast to the poets of the nineteenth century who were more interested in traditional India, as Toru Dutt’s Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan (1882) testifies.”

He is of the view that Indian English poetry can only be marginal to Indian poetry in other languages but that thankfully it has emerged “in the mid-twentieth century... from the mainstream of English literature and [made] its appearance as part of Indian literature.” His next statement that Indian English poetry is “Indian is sensibility and content, and English in language” and that “it is rooted in and stems from the Indian environment” begs more questions than it answers. Why is poetry written before mid-twentieth century not Indian in sensibility and content? How can one state that it is not rooted in Indian environment? Parthasarathy too seems to be prescribing a certain Indianness, a true, authentic, Indian sensibility. Most curiously he does all this in an anthology titled Then Twentieth Century Indian Poets - the stress being on “Indian”. The title does not say anywhere that these are Indian English poets, it is their Indianness that is being highlighted, or is it that the slip shows the feeling that only English poetry can be Indian writing? It doesn’t seem the latter because Parthasarathy shows awareness as critic and poet that Indian English writing is only marginal to Indian writing. Hence his editorial choice of Indian is the title can only be to reiterate the
Indianness of these poets. Curiously the next anthology for OUP, Arvind Krishna Mehrotra's *Twelve Modern Indian Poets*, still highlights the Indianness and omits to mention the English language that these poets write in. This despite the fact that Mehrotra remembers an earlier essay where he had called the title of one selection 'misleading and cocky' because it failed to indicate that the choice of Indian poets was restricted to those who write in English. Mehrotra's changed stance is not explained by him but one can see that it is motivated by the hurt that "the Indian poet who writes in English is looked upon with suspicion by other Indian writers, as though he did not belong either to the subcontinent of his birth or its literature." So even if his credo is that "A good poem is a good poem, and not because it matches the colour of the poet's skin or passport"; even if he is critical of views which "narrowly equate Indian poetry with Indianness", he is willing to assert that it is Indian. And this assertion is necessary because the poetry is in English.

This critical expectation may blinker one to the writers' project(s) and the reasons for them. Balachandra Rajan in an important article titled "Identity and Nationality" terms the first "the process of creative self-realization" and the second as "the establishing of a collective myth or image". Rajan asserts that "To create an identity is part of the essential business of an artist." The question of nationality isn't important to the artist's concerns but "A sense of nationality can grow out of the discovery of identity and it is important that this should happen frequently, if one is to establish a tradition that is both distinctive and rooted." Rajan goes on to discuss the pressures on the writer in "newer literatures", including
“the pressures of a literary nationality” and warns that it is easy for a writer to yield to these “national” specifications of the social historian. He calls this the documentary view of literature. He contrasts this further with the “patriotic” view “in which the writer becomes the voice of nationhood and the achievement of an Indian writer is judged by the intensity of his Indianness.” In his opinion it is not clear what this Indianness is and “those who flourish the term as their exclusive virtue, display in the process very little of the Indian capacity for assimilation and tolerance.” In any case Rajan feels that in the eyes of these nativistic critics “the Indian who writes in English is ex hypothesi un-Indian. He is a product of two cultures and therefore abnormal by the standards of either.” He is bitter that it is said that the Indian English writer can speak for neither the East nor the West though he may have some usefulness when the dialogue breaks down. But, he feels, the presence of these two “cultures in one’s mind” can be extremely enabling and “the discordance between these cultures can be creative.” He cautions that “to shut one’s self off from the challenge of the ‘non-Indian’ betrays not a sense of nationality but an obsession with insularity.” In the zeal of his argument Rajan moves away from his crucial notion that a sense of nationality can come out of one’s definition of one’s identity. The early Indian English writers did not write to any social historian’s or patriot’s agenda - they wrote to situate themselves, to find their place in life and literature, it was thus inevitable that they would rediscover and assert their linkages to their social, geographical, and cultural/literary
environment(s) and tradition(s). Their sense of nationality grew from their search and definition of self-identity.

It is in this light that one should view Toru Dutt’s attempt to render the Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan - it is not an escape into traditional India but an attempt to situate herself in a cultural continuity. C. D. Narasimhaiah writes that this volume “shows at once her knowledge of Sanskrit and the tradition it nourished, not to speak of the folk culture which had also received its nourishment from Sanskrit.” It is in this continuity, in her retelling of the legends that she marks her space in India Narasimhaiah who praises these poems as the best “of their kind in English” goes on to say of her rendering of “Savitri” that “Toru is not translating from the Mahabharata story; it takes shape in her vision of it. She gets into her poem all the essential facts from the original story and her own assessment of it.” Toru Dutt affirms here as she does even in her sonnet “Lotus”, which is another example of her poetic gifts, the strength of her own Indian tradition. This is why she becomes “the first Indian English poet to make an extensive use of Indian myth and legend” in Naïk’s estimation. In spite of being “a recent Christian convert living in a half-anglicized environment at home”, in spite of missing England and wanting to be there, she can write her Ancient Ballads and Legends because she needs to create her own literary and cultural space, she needs to work out her relationship to her environment. Her discovery and definition of her identity leads her to a sense of nationality. It comes and should come as to surprise than she displays “an instinctive understanding of the spirit underlying” the legends she writes about, and
an acute awareness of the abiding values of Indian life."³⁷ It is this use of "Indian" combined with "authenticity" that leads to a troublesome prescriptive aspect of Indian English criticism as we have seen - the position that a writer has to be "authentically Indian" and that, to be so, he has to be Hindu or well versed in the legends, myths, and practices of Hinduism. Rajan, we have seen, tackles this question squarely pointing to Hinduism’s tradition of tolerance and acceptance.

This also brings us to the current debates and thinking on the "nation", where nations are seen as "imaginary constructs that depend for their assistance on an apparatus of cultural fictions in which imaginative literature plays a decisive role."³⁸ This position differentiates between nation as a modern nation-state and as "something more ancient and nebulous - the ‘natio’ - a local community, domicile, family, condition of belonging" (p.39). But though Brennan (and fellow theoreticians) would dismiss the point of view which places one is, "country in an immemorial past" as an attempt to deny and erase the "arbitrariness" of the nation,⁴⁰ popular sentiment would always argue that it is this sense of belonging from "an immemorial past" that keeps the nation together. So Ernest Renan says:

A nation is a soul, a spiritual principle. Two things, which in truth are but one, constitute this soul or spiritual principle. On lies in the past, one in the present. One is the possession in common of a rich legacy of memories; the other is present-day consent, the desire to live together, the will to perpetuate the value of the heritage that one has received in an undivided form. The nation is the culmination of a long past of endeavours, sacrifice, and devotion.⁴¹
When a theoretical position does not allow you to acknowledge see only the modern manifestation of the nation state then you contradictory position where there is a negation of the very “le memories” and “heritage” that makes the common consent to the nation possible. Thus you may have two volumes of Women W India: 600 B.C. to the Present where the editors argue that “Jay Nehru’s Discovery of India (is) perhaps the best known ‘foundational fictions’ of the Indian nation.” The point to be not is that Nehru’s Discovery of India was published in 1946, and India isn’t very old. The editors, also “understand the nationality not as an essence, but as a historically constituted te Harish Trivedi calls this a “dehistoricization of India” and points it is “India” which “holds together this collection of writings from two and a half thousand years and eleven different languages” a which is “this whole historical and cultural linguistic ‘terrain’” may be different at different times and with different groups is they imagine this nation anew. The early “nationalist” Indian poets would have agreed with this position completely as they imagine their own space and “imagined” their environment.

As Verghese says the poetry of the early Indian English po “Indian in so far as they made an earnest attempt to express personality of India through their verse... The patriotic verse of the ancient legends of India turned into English verse by Madh Dutt and Toru Dutt, the romantic effusions of Sarojini Naidu ab sights and sounds of India are a proof of this attempt.” He then
to point out that Aurobindo’s poetry, “mystical and spiritual in content... also bears the stamp of India’s personality.”

“India’s personality” may be perceived and expressed differently by different groups of people in different times. Aurobindo’s India may be one of “metaphysical longing, mystical contemplation and spiritual illumination,” an India that never seems to go completely out of fashion. Aurobindo Ghose’s reputation so much under attack by post-independence Indian English poets is a case in point here. Like his brother Manmohan Ghose, Aurobindo spent his formative years in England and was well versed in European classics. These classics influenced and informed his poetry throughout his life but held almost full sway only initially. According to Verghese, “the poet soon realised that his inspiration should come not from ‘Sicilian Olive-groves’ or ‘Parnassus’ but from the Indian myths.”

In an early poem “Envoi” included in his Short Poems (1890-1900), a volume consisting “mostly minor verse of the ‘romantic twilight’ of the Eighteen Nineties, celebrating the characteristic themes of love, sorrow, death and liberty in a typically romantic style to which the introduction of Greek names ... adds a classical touch,” Aurobindo already hears India recalling him from “Pale poems, weak and few... Offspring of the divine Hellenic muse:

“Me from her lotus heaven Saraswati
Has called to regions of eternal snow
And Ganges pacing to the southern sea,
Ganges upon whose shore the flowers of Eden blow.”

This call of India resulted in the growth of the “spiritual” Aurobindo known all over the world. His epic Savitri, an ambitious work
of 23,813 lines, in twelve books, and forty nine cantos, is the most well-known, even if not the most read, of his works. Aurobindo worked on it for fifty years and shaped it “into an epic of humanity and divinity, of death and the life divine”, according to Naik.50 Verghese feels that “Savitri is great in its fusion of mysticism, philosophy and poetry in the true tradition of India’s vedic poetry.”51 Naik’s judgment is that “‘Savitri’ is a major epic but not a perfect poem. It is however an audacious attempt to pour God’s wine which is perpetually new - into the age-old epic bottle, transforming the receptacle itself in the process. With all its limitations... it remains a landmark in Indian English poetry.”52 Iyengar would agree with this for he says that what he finds “so striking about this epic is its sheer sweep, its amazing modernity, its pervasive mystical quality and its singular poetic power”.53 Iyengar quotes with approval the words of Professor Raymond Frank Piper - “Savitri is perhaps the most powerful artistic work in the world for expanding man’s mind towards the Absolute.”54

Vergheese feels that Aurobindo’s “real achievement... as a poet consists in the fact that the bulk of his poetic achievement has about it an aroma of the spirituality of India and is as much an expression of a personal vision as that of the spiritual personality of India.”55 This “spiritual personality of India” was also part of his “personal vision” and it has to be noted that Aurobindo was for a brief spell a political radical (1906-1910). Naik compares him to his brother Manmohan and says that, because Aurobindo found his roots in India unlike his brother, while “Manmohan’s career is a sad story of arrested artistic development, Sri
Aurobindo’s, a glorious chronicle of progress from patriot to poet, yogi and seer. The important terms here is “patriot” for the seer-poet of *Savitri* was preceded by a poet turning consciously to Indian subjects, legends and myths. Among his early long poems are *Urvasie* and *Baji Prabhau*. In *Urvasie* he celebrates his return to India and Indianness in recreating the music of the Indian names: “Menaca, Misracayshie, Mullica/Rumbha, Nelabha, Shela, Nolinie/Lolita, Lavonya and Tilottama/ Many delightful names.” *Baji Prabhau* typically of the times is a celebration in verse of Hindu valour. Aurobindo points out in his note to the poem that “this poem is founded on the historical incident of the heroic self-sacrifice of Baji Prabhau Deshpande, who to cover Shivaji’s retreat, held the pass of Rangana for two hours with a small company of men against twelve thousand Moguls. Beyond the single fact of this great exploit there has been no attempt to preserve historical accuracy.” This is the virile India that Aurobindo wanted to awaken:

So was the fatal gorge  
Filled with the clamour of close-locked fight,  
Sword rang on sword, the slogan shout, the cry  
Of guns, the hiss of bullets filled the air.  
And murderous strife heaped up the scanty space,  
Rajput and strong Mahratta breathing hard  
In desperate battle.

Aurobindo had just before this written a Bengali pamphlet *Bhawani Mandir* provoked by the move to partition Bengal where he had exhorted people to fight for the nation, to rededicate themselves to Shakti - “We have abandoned Shakti and are therefore abandoned by Shakti.
The mother is not in our hearts, in our brains, in our arms. He preaches against defeatism:

Many of us, utterly overcome by tamas, the dark and heavy demon of inertia, are saying now-a-days that it is impossible, that India is decayed, bloodless and lifeless too weak ever to recover; that our race is doomed to extinction. It is a foolish and idle saying. No man or nation need be weak unless he chooses, the man or nation need perish unless he deliberately chooses extinction.

Aurobindo then addresses the definition of nation:

What is a nation? What is our mother country? It is not a piece of earth, nor a figure of speech, or a fiction of the mind. It is a mighty Shakti...

In an earlier letter dated 30th August 1905, to his wife Mrinalini Devi, he had written that:

whereas others regard the country as an inert object, and know it as the plains, the fields, the forests, the mountains and rivers, I look upon my country as the mother.

He then asks his wife, - “What would a sun do when a demon sitting on the breast of his mother is drinking her blood?” He states that he is going to fight “with the power of knowledge.” His statement that “the power of the warrior is not the only kind of force, there is also the power of the Brahman which is founded on knowledge”, assumes significance when one sees the contour of his life from poet to patriot to seer. It is thus to Aurobindo’s contemporaries that Baji Prabhou says:

... make iron of your souls
Yet if Bhawaniwills, strength and sword
Can stay our Nation’s future from o’erthrow.

80
Prince Sunjoy’s mother in Aurobindo’s *Vidula* (first published as *The Mother to Her Son*) too exhorts her son to fight to recover his kingdom:

“Out to battle, do thy man’s work, falter not in high attempt,
So a man is quit before his God and saved from self-contempt
Sunjoy, Sunjoy, waste not thy flame in smoke!

When thou winnest difficult victory from the clutch of fearful strife,
I shall know thou art my offspring and
shall love my son indeed.

Thus a story from the Mahabharata assumes a new significance as Sunjoy’s mother is seen as akin to Mother India, that anguish at the inaction of sons similar in intensity and despair. And once again he invokes the Mother Goddess in the *Durga Stotra* to give strength to those fighting for India: “In the battle of life, in India’s battle, we are warriors commissioned by thee: Mother, give to our heart and mind a titan’s strength, a titan’s energy, to our soul and intelligence a god’s character and knowledge” 64

In his attempt to construct his India, Aurobindo also translated from Sanskrit and Bengali and finally shifted to his spiritual abode in life and literature. His India as well as “his poetry is suffused with a philosophical or mystical glow.” 65 He could not accept the partition of India for to him “India has a single soul, and while we have to wait till we can speak of an India one and indivisible, our cry must be: “Let the soul of India live for ever!”
In his “Message for the Independence Day” he hopes that India would make August 15th “an important date in a new age opening for the whole world, for the political, social, cultural and spiritual future of humanity.” He hopes that the partition is temporary and decrees that “the partition must go.” He hopes that this unity “may come about naturally” but whatever way it comes about “the division must go; unity must and will be achieved, for it is necessary for the greatness of India’s future.” He places his agenda for the development of the world on various planes before us and outlines what he sees as India’s role but what is of interest in this construct is the special place given to India’s spirituality - “the spiritual gift of India to the world has already begun.” He says that “more and more eyes are turning towards her with hope and there is even an increasing resort not only to her teachings, but to her psychic and spiritual practice.” This was his India as of many others - an India which drew its strength from its spiritualism, an India which was united in its Hindu past and practices and which scored over current divisions and obstacles of caste and creed in its pursuit of universal truth and happiness, a oneness of all spirit.

Sarojini Naidu too stresses her Indianness while she says “she was brought up to be an Indian (not a Hindu or a brahmin) and a proud citizen of the world.” As Tharu and Lalita say it “is clearly evident in her poetry, her speeches, and her political commitments, the young Sarojini was shaped as much by the rich Muslim culture of Hyderabad as by the traditional Hindu ethos of her family and the Western influences of her education.” In Naik’s judgment Sarojini Naidu’s “best poetry” is “an
authentic Indian English lyric utterance exquisitely tuned to the composite Indian ethos, bringing home to the unbiased reader all the opulence, pageantry and charm of traditional Indian life, and the splendour of the Indian scene. Veena Rani Prasad feels that because of her growing years “in a cosmopolitan city like Hyderabad, Sarojini’s genius shows a pleasant confluence of different cultures and conventions - Hindu, Sufi and Christian.” Naik also feels that her “lyric art has been strongly influenced both by British romanticism ...and Persian and Urdu poetic modes, with their characteristic opulence.” He goes on to say that “A Hindu Brahmin domiciled in Muslim Hyderabad, she sings of both Krishna and Allah and Radha and Gulnao, with equal zest.” But this was not the case till the famous advice from Edmund Gosse. What this results in, according to Varghese, is poems than depict “not a realistic picture of India but a land of bazaars full of bright colours and perfumes and peopled with picturesque beggars, wandering minstrels and snake charmers.” This is the image that western media still wants to project of India - take for instance the “local” fillers foreign networks use during their telecast of cricket matches held in India. Verghese feels then this is an especial drawback in Sarojini Naidu’s poetry “because in accepting Gosse’s advise to write on Indian themes using Indian imagery she seems to have aimed an interpreting India to the West and it must be feared, succeeded only in confirming the more superficial aspects of Kipling’s vision of India.” C.D. Narasimhaiah blames this rather on her “sentimentality, sugary sentimentality, (which) is the bane of her verse.” Shankar Mokashi Punekar in his defense of Sarojini Naidu concedes that
she wrote for an English audience, “and rightly so, even after her return to India.”

He also writes that “Sarojini’s poems are intended for a ‘literary’ audience: professors, honours graduates, amateur versifiers.”

But whoever they were written for they are on “Indian themes” and “are about India” as he reiterates.

This Indianness is expressed not only in her overtly patriotic poems. Verghese states that “the bulk of her poetry in The Golden Threshold, The Bird of Time and The Broken Wing is Indian in spirit, thought, emotion and imagery.”

He speaks of the “Hindu account of Sarojini’s mind.” citing the final lines of “The Festival of Serpents” because they “beautifully sum up the Hindu concept of the Absolute.”

“Leili” is another poem much admired for its Hindu imagery:

The serpents are asleep among the poppies  
The fireflies light the soundless panther’s way  
To tangled paths where shy gazelles are straying,  
And parrot-plumes outshines the dying day,  
O soft! the lotus-buds upon the stream  
Are stirring like sweet maidens when they dream.

A caste-mark on the azure brows of heaven,  
The golden moon burns sacred, solemn, bright  
The winds are dancing in the forest-temple,  
And swooning at the holy feet of Night,  
Hush! in the silence mystic voices sing  
And make the gods their incense-offering.

Narasimhaiah who otherwise doesn’t think much of Sarojini Naidu as a poet picks up the first line of this second stanza for praise: “The figure of the moon as a caste-mark (kumkum or tilak might have been better) on
the forehead of heavens is in itself a work of daring imagination.\textsuperscript{85}

J.H. Cousins remarks:

The symbolism in Mrs. Naidu's poem of the dancing winds as devotees in the temple of nature must surely stand among the fine things of literature. Still good as it is, it is poor in comparison with the splendidly daring piece of anthropomorphosis of the first two lines. The figuring of the moon as a caste mark on the forehead of heaven is in itself a unique achievement of the imagination in poetry in the English language.\textsuperscript{86}

Cousins remarks that "the image lifts India to the literary heavens; it threatens the throne of Diana of the classics, it releases Luna from the work of asylum-keeper and gives her instead the office of remembrancer..."\textsuperscript{87} What is being remarked on here is the construction of a poetic India as a Hindu India in poetry. Verghese picks two of the many of Sarojini Naidu's poems "that are Hindu both in conception and in articulation and have a beauty of their own in the Indianness of their imagery" because they "deserve special mention in the context of the expression of an Indian personality through the medium of English."\textsuperscript{88}

The poems he chooses are "To a Buddha seated on a Lotus" and "In salutation to My Father's Spirit" C.D. Narasimhaiah too picks the first of the two poems - "To a Buddha" - for praise and says that in the poem "the poet rejoices in inaccessible desire and heavenward hunger, and in doing so she sums up the central philosophy of the Vedanta."\textsuperscript{89} Verghese is quick to point out that her sympathies are not confined "to Hinduism alone; they extend to the world of Islam."\textsuperscript{90} He gives as examples the following poems: "The Purdah Nashin", "The Imam Bara", "The Old
Women” and “A Song from Shiraz”. To this she can add other poems like “Humayun to Zobeida”, through an adaptation from Urdu or even “The Queen’s Rival.”

Sarojini Naidu’s India is thus a picturesque India, an India not only of the cities but also of the countryside, of peoples of various kinds, an India of multiple religions and traditions. In her patriotic poem “Awake!” where Mother India is implored to “Waken, O mother!” by the narrative voice in the plural, speaking for the whole country. This “we” who promise to set India “again in the forefront of glory” belong to various religious groups:

- **Hindus**
  
  Mother! the flowers of our worship have crowned thee!

- **Parsees**
  
  Mother! the flame of our hope shall surround thee!

- **Mussulmans**
  
  Mother: the sword of our love shall defend thee!

- **Christians**
  
  Mother! the song of our faith shall attend thee!

- **All creeds**
  
  Shall not our dauntless devotion avail thee?
  
  Harken! O queen and O goddess, we hail thee!

As Elena J. Kalinnikova puts it: “Only is the unity of activities of different religions, Sarojini envisaged guarantee of victory over the English colonisers.” In “The Gift of India” Naidu speaks of all Indian soldiers sacrificed in World War I and it is this sympathy and feeling of oneness that characterises all her folk songs. Verghese complains that “her poetry makes India altogether a land of romance and mystery” and says that her
folk songs as well as love lyrics suffer from this. Among the poems he lists as flawed is “Indian Weavers”, a poem Narasimhaiah feels an example of her success! Narasimhaiah almost reluctantly concedes that “it must be said that where she succeeded in keeping her emotion somewhat tidy, her sentiment genuine and her rhythms faithful to the folk songs of South India she did compose some very good verses...” He quotes “Indian Weavers” in full and comments that the twelve lines give “an elliptical, allusive, and symbolic presentation of life’s journey from birth to death.” He convincingly argues that each of the stanza is devoted to one of the Hindu Trinity - Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva. The poet he feels “gives convincing proof of the intimate knowledge of her own tradition with surprising economy and sharpness of touch.”

Sarojini Naidu, a Bengali married to a Telugu man, a woman in an age of men, a writer in English during the height of nationalism, is certainly not a simple versifier. As Kalinnikova says “Sarojini Naidu’s songs, organically connected with the Indian songs of folklore, are at the same time a gift of ancient literary tradition.” That she was conscious of the position of women is quite evident elsewhere. Iyengar quotes a speech made by her at the 1906 Calcutta session of the Indian Social Congress where “she adroitly linked up the suppression of women’s rights in India with the loss of the country’s freedom.” She enjoined the men and the audience to “restore to your women their ancient rights” in order to achieve their own liberty. This fellow-feeling for her sisterhood is expressed directly in “Nasturtiums”:
Poignant and subtle and bitter perfume
Exquisite, luminous, passionate bloom,
Your leaves interwoven of fragrance and fire
Are Savitri’s sorrow and Sita’s desire.
Draupadi’s longing, Damayanti’s fears,
And sweetest Sakuntala’s magical tears!

Her India is an inclusive India which fashions a place for Sarojini Naidu herself who had crossed various barriers. Hence she shows the influence of gazals and Urdu literature as well as Hindu songs, myths legends and practices. She sings about the Hyderabad city scape as well as the countryside. She sings of the South as well as the North (take for example “A Rajput Love-song” or “A Love Song from the North”). Her India contains all for only then could it contain her. After all, as C.D. Narasimhaiah says, and perhaps many of her generation may have felt, she was “a mere women with all the disabilities common to her sex” (emphasis added) who voiced “forth the country’s deepest aspirations in the language of the rulers.” 97 Sarojini Naidu’s India would have had no place for such a comment.

The decades before independence saw the flowering of mystical and religious poetry and the India they constructed, as in Aurobindo’s case (even Sarojini Naidu moves towards mystical vision in her last published book the Broken in Wing). This was a logical progression in the construction of identity - both personal and national. This spiritualism was a contemporary quest, not a recounting of past history. Makarand Paranjape lists the following as Indian mystics and poets - Ram Sharma,
Swami Vivekananda, Swami Rama Tirtha, Sri Ananda Acharya, Puran Singh, Swami Paramananda, Swami Sivananda, Paramahamsa Yogananda, Jiddu Krishnamurthi, Mohan Singh, Nissim Erekiel, Girdhari Tikku, and Syed Amanuddin. Paranjape also gives a long list of religious poets. This spiritual-religious India is not an all Hindu India. Other then Sikhism, and Islam, Christianity, Judaism, Zoroastrianism, and even what can be termed Aurobindianism shape the poets and their poetry. Paranjape also points out that there is “secular spiritual poetry that does not derive from any particular religious tradition by P.M. Bapat, C.V. Balakrishna, Harindranath Chattopadhyaya, G.K. Chettur” and others. This range of mystical religious poetry constructs a multi-faceted multi-cultural India but an India still united in its quest. This large body of verse makes Naik comment that “it is surprising that the impact of the Gandhian whirlwind produced no outstanding poetry of any kind, though numerically the poetic scene remains as thickly populated as ever” between nineteen twenty and nineteen forty-seven. This is perhaps because the nationalist urge was being sublimated and realised in spiritual poetry. Naik says that most of the poets writing in this period were “practitioners of religious, mystical, philosophical, reflective verse, including the disciples of Sri Aurobindo, and poets mainly in the Romantic-Victorian tradition”. The two groups are “not mutually exclusive, since the romantic banner flutters equally prominently over the heads of the poets of the first group also.” The list of poets and the titles of their books for the periods 1857-1920, and 1920-1947 given in
Naik's History make interesting reading in themselves and show the mosaic that is and was India.\textsuperscript{103}

Joseph Furtado, however, brings in an extra dimension to pre-Independence poetry, an engagingly different physical and linguistic landscape. A poet from Goa his native land becomes part of Indian English poetry:

Hills and valleys everywhere,
on each hill a cross or shrine,
In each valley cots and farms,
Other lands may be as fair,
Yet what land, what land but mine
Is so blest with peaceful charms?
Land of palm and cashew-tree,
Dear as life art thou to me!
("My Native Land")

His use of Indian words in his English poetry has been often remarked on as well as his humour and felicity in the language. He writes of the Goan countryside as also his exile to the city. Iyengar writes that "Furtado sings with an easy apparently artless abandon, remembering things past, and praising the crosses and the shrines, the mango trees and the brahmin girls, the bulbuls' nests and the monsoon butterflies."\textsuperscript{104} With deceptive ease Furtado extends India not only across imperialist frontiers but also to include a whole range of characters and every day speech - a mix of languages - as we shall see in the next chapter:

Sly argue, the old Irani!
    Has made a lakh, they say -
lakh in land and money -
by mixing milk with pani.
Furtado’s poetry may be like a breath of fresh air but the mystical religious poetry that’s paramount in this period was an important phase in the re-imagination of India. There was social poetry, political poetry, written during this period as well as poems praising ancient valour like S.L. Chordia’s “Chitor”:

Here is the old Chitor, queen-like and crown’d
With deathless glory, in the long sad past
For thee the legion Rajput chiefs fell fast
Amid the shock of battle...

They fought
For thee, they died for thee whene’er thy walls
Guarding thy places, temples, towers and halls,
Were by the mighty hordes of Moslems sought.
O Nurse and Mother of the brave and free!
How red with blood the path that lead to thee.

Evoking the grand India as well on awakening the conscience of an enslaved people still had a place in poetry:

What care I for Lajpat Rai
Or Ajit Singh or Deenanath
What care I for Jaswant Rai
For the Pindi riot or its aftermath?
What care I?

If it please the great Sircar
To deport a man or two,
I can but say ‘All right, Sir!
If they won’t deport me too!
(“What Care I for Lajpat Rai”, Annaji)

It is only after Independence that the Indian English poets can turn their full efforts to writing about the unjust disparities and not so sylvan conditions in the land. Vinayak Krishna Gokak whose poetry straddles
independence sets the agenda in “The Song of India” where Mother India gives these various answers to his queries:

‘Sing of the beggar and the leper
That swarm my streets.
Sing of the filth and the dirt
that foul my sylvan retreats’

and

‘Sing of the millions that toil
Sing of the wrinkled face
Indexing ignorance.
Sing of the helpless child
Born in a bleak, dark home.’

and

‘But sing also of the strikes, early and late,
Of iron men that came in their wake,
Of class-war and its correlate.

Gokak does feel that in the future it would be possible to sing a song to Mother India “Heart-whole, unalloyed”, a paean “bathed in the stainless blue/unvapouring in the void”. Gokak’s vision may still be shared by some poets but it is a hopeful vision of a very distant future now! The movement of Gokak’s poem is interesting too - he starts off by wishing to sing of physical contours of the land:

‘Shall I sing
Of the Himalayas with their snow-born peaks,
Of the three seas that wash your palm?
Shall I sing
Of your clear dawn with its pure gold-streaks?

He then turns to:

.... rock-cut temples, epics in stone,
Of your children that died to call you their own,
Their very own?
Of the seers and prophets that hewed the straight path
For the man that pilgrims alone?

Gokak’s next wish is to celebrate the industrial present:

‘Shall I sing of the dam and the lake?
Of steel mills, the ship-building yard?
Of the men that work hard
To technologise, to put you on the page
Of the atomic age?’

But finally the only un-alloyed song he can sing is caused or prophesied by a spiritual vision:

Her forehead opened like earth’s destiny
Yielding the sun-god...
... Like a nightmare, fled the might
And the sun-beam was as the Hand that saves.

India could be the land, the cultural and architectural heritage and history, the people, the present ‘monumental’ endeavours, as well as a spiritual quest - with all its blemishes the poets’ country still. India is home and “Home is where you gather grace”, as Nissim Ezekiel puts it so well in “Enterprise.”

Ezekiel is of course the Yudishtara of any history of post-Independence Indian English poetry. In his person and poetic persona he, like many of the earlier Indian English poets, exhibits all complexes factors and dilemmas of the Indian English poet. King says that “Being a Jew and raised as a secular rationalist by his scientist father made him an outsider to Hindu-Muslim culture; it is his very outsiderness, his marginality, which makes him a representative voice of the urbanized,
western-educated Indian." In other words Ezekiel too has to construct his India which will allow him to be at home even when he feels that his birth and upbringing and education have made him an outsider to a large part of the culture of his land. Ezekiel too like earlier poets asserts his right to belong, makes his connections with the past. In King’s opinion “Ezekiel showed that it was possible to write about oneself without being self-consciously Indian and that an Indian poetry could express the experiences of the educated and urbanized and need not to obsessed with mythology, peasants and nationalist slogans.” This had of course been demonstrated by earlier poets too, the important factor here being that Ezekiel wrote and writes in a free India. This coupled with the fact that the conventions of poetic idiom and subject matter had changed allowed the poet a greater ease in depicting every day life. Thus his poetry can prompt King to remark that with Ezekiel “a post-colonial poetry started which reflects the lives and identities that an increasing number of educated Indians knew or would seek.” But it must be noted that Ezekiel sees his commitment to India as a conscious act or, to put it differently, he sees that one must consciously affirm one’s Indianness, construct and inhabit one’s India. In the poem (“Background, casually”) that is quoted in the beginning of this chapter he says (to quote once again):

I have made my commitments now
This is one: to stay where I am.

This “renewal of vows” is necessary for all poets not just the poet whose introduction is that:
I went to Roman Catholic school,  
A mugging Jew among the wolves.  
They told me I had killed the Christ,  
That year I won the scripture prize.  
A Muslim sportsman boxed my ears.  

But this background does make it especially necessary that the poet “choose” publicly and privately to belong. As Ezekiel once said in an interview:

My background did make me an outsider, but it’s too easy to talk of being an outsider, I don’t want to remain negative: I feel I have to connect, and turn the situation to the positive.  

This need to connect even leads Ezekiel to translate from Marathi - “Part of my reason for translating from Marathi is to belong even more fully to the Indian scene.”

India is Ezekiel’s, as is even more so Bombay, Ezekiel reiterates in various places. He seems to anticipate comments like Vilas Sarang’s that he “belongs, in some important ways, with those who wanted to become ‘English’ poets.” He begins his above quoted interview with this statement:

I regard myself essentially as an Indian poet writing in English. I have a strong sense of belonging, not only to India, but to this city. I would never leave Bombay…

As in “Enterprise”, Ezekiel says in “A Morning Walk” that “His native place he could not shun.” And again in “Island” he writes of Bombay “Unsuitable for song as well as sense” and says:
I cannot leave the island,
I was born here and belong

Even now a host of miracles
hurries me to daily business,
minding the ways of the island
as a good native should,
taking calm and calmness in my stride

Ezekiel is "a good native" and this quality he exhibits in his essay
"Naipaul's India and mine" where he begins by agreeing with many of
Naipaul's views but then castigates him for being "so often uninvolved
and unconcerned." He criticises Naipaul for writing "exclusively from
the point of view of his own dilemma, his temperamental alienation from
his mixed background, his choice and escape." He then says that for most
people escape "is not from the community but into it." Ezekiel too has
"escaped" into the community. He goes on to say in the essay that:

In the India which I have presumed to call mine, I
acknowledge without hesitation the existence of all the
darkness Mr. Naipaul has discovered. I am not a Hindu and
my background makes me a natural outsider. Circumstances
and decisions relate me to India. In other countries I am a
foreigner. In India I am an Indian.

He states his position unequivocally:

India is simply my environment. A man can do something
for and in his environment by being fully what he is, by not
withdrawing from it. I have not withdrawn from India.

His attitude to India is complex. He writes in the fifth of the "Poster
Poems":

I've never been a refugee
except of the spirit,
a loved and troubled country
which is my home and enemy.
The temptation to escape “away” rather than “into” is ever present and ever resisted as in the seventh of “The Egotist’s Prayers”:

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

It is this commitment that makes King say that Ezekiel could be seen as “a leading nationalist.” King says that this is unusual because “nationalists tend to be traditionalists and flag-wavers rather than modern sceptics...” In King’s opinion “Post-colonial nationalism needs to be more sophisticated, ironic and critical than the simple sentiments felt in the days before independence.” Gieve Patel feels that this commitment leads Ezekiel “to open his eyes outwards, to see heartlessness, brutality, the destruction of the human potential... The lament then sometimes becomes an irritating whine as the pressures of post-Independence India begin to bludgeon” Ezekiel’s sensibility. Ezekiel’s India, Patel feels, leads in his poetry to a “querulousness against a harsh, unlovable environment.” Patel also says that Ezekiel’s less successful poetry “comes close to high-minded editorial leaders.” But this “harsh, unlovable environment” is home, very often both hospitable and lovable. In the much anthologised poem “Night of the Scorpion” you can see the contradictory impulses at work, a sense of distance and alienation as well as acceptance and love. This non-urban India is very different from the Bombay he inhabits but human emotions link everything; affection (and perhaps humour) colours all. To the poet, the peasants came “like swarms of flies/and buzzed the Name of God a hundred times” when his
mother was stung by a scorpion. The distance between the peasant and the father (and hence son) is bridged by the mother who after her ordeal “only said:/Thank God the scorpion picked on me/and spared my children”. King writes that this “might be described as the typical ending of a joke about an Indian or Jewish mother...” The joke as well as the set of ironies help to bridge the alienation, to see other points of view, to accept a larger India. But this poet’s usual beat is the city, Bombay:

Barbaric city sick with slums,
Deprived of seasons, blessed with rains,
Its hawkers, beggars, iron-lunged,
Processions led by frantic drums,
A million purgatorial lanes,
And child-like masses, many tongued
Whose wages are in words and crumbs.
(“A Morning Walk”)

Contrast this and other descriptions by Ezekiel of the city - for example his characterising Bombay as the city which “flowers into slums/and skyscrapers (“Island”) - with an early poem on Bombay by Cowasji Nowrosi Vesuvala whose book of poems, Courting the Muse, was published in 1879:

Where Malabar’s long hill, all clad in green,
Runs forth into the water, where between
It and the shore the shallow waters glide,
Again retreating with each turning tide,
Each aspect fraught with beauty to the eye,
And blending glories of earth, sea and sky;
Scarce throu, O Naples, with thy lovely bay
Lit by the sunlight of the summer’s day
Canst dim the glory of this Eastern scene
(“From Malabar Hill - Bombay”)
It is not only a century that separates the two poets - both Bombay and other circumstances and environments (the political, the poetical) have changed.

This is Independent India, in charge of its own affairs and the poet can only bemoan that he is:

Always in the sun’s eye  
Here among the beggars.  
Hawkers, pavement sleepers,  
Hutment dwellers, slums,  
Dead souls of men and gods,  
Burnt-out mothers, frightened  
Virgins, wasted child  
And tortured animal,  
all in noisy silence  
Suffering the place and time,  
I ride my elephant of thought,  
A Cézanne slung around my neck.  
("In India")

As Michael Garman says about the last lines, “this is his declaration that assimilation will be achieved ... that a form will be put on life without the rejection or alteration of any part.”121 In other words the poet will construct an India true to himself, which assimilates all. He watches, records and places himself in a land of contrast where he can only express his despair:

Of what use then to see and think?  
I cannot even say I care or do not care,  
perhaps it is a kind of despair.  
("On Bellasis Road")

Sudesh Mishra says that “the moral of the poem involves ... this lack of success” implied in the line “of what use then to see and think?” He says
that “The ethical discourse ... is constructed around the urban dweller’s inability to render meaningful his observations - that ‘perhaps... is a kind of despair’.”\textsuperscript{122}

This “despair” is part of the spiritual quest, not a mere expression of frustration. This quest leads Ezekiel through “The Egotist’s Prayers” to the “Hymns in Darkness” and the “Latter-Day Psalms”. If the poet’s increased interest in his Judaic heritage is apparent, so is his exposure to the Vedic hymns. Paranjape includes him in his analyses of mystical poets and states that “Ezekiel’s poetry reveals his primary concern with understanding the meaning of his life and attaining self-realization. Poetry seems to be the means to this goal.”\textsuperscript{123} So this “modern” poet who is seen to herald a new phase in Indian English poetry actually carries on the work of the earlier writers including their philosophical quest (inspired by both Vedas & Upanishads as by Judaic, texts as Mishra shows in his reading of ‘Hymns in Darkness’ and ‘Counsel’)\textsuperscript{124} in order to construct his identity to find his place:

\begin{verbatim}
I am afraid
of bleeding to death,
as I once nearly did,
but I know I must find it
that invisible and intimate place
of which my prophet speaks.
\end{verbatim}

Sarang sees this negatively when he says that despite “his affinities with the post-Independence spirit, Ezekiel belongs, in some important ways” with the earlier poets, those Sarang says who wanted to become ‘English’ poets. Sarang feels that Ezekiel “is among the last notable poets of the
Whatever be the judgment it is clear that Sarang sees no disjunction or discontinuity between the earlier poetry and Ezekiel's. It must be noted that the Ezekiel discussed here is of the 1960s and later. He started his poetic career in 1948, publishing *A time to Change* in 1952. He too went to England, wrote metrically "disciplined" poetry of loneliness and love before returning to India to become yet another Indian English poet who follows the paradigm.

Through the nineteen forties and fifties Aurobindo's followers and others continued to write their technically accomplished mystical, religious verse - take for instance poets like K.D. Seshna, Punjalal, Nalini Kanta Gupta, Nirodbaran, Nishikanto, D.K. Roy, Thomis, Roman, Prithvi Singh Nahar, P.N. Mukherjee, and V. Madhusudan Reddy. This list is not exhaustive and is given to show how well this India was flourishing. P. Lal who raised the banner of revolution against such poetry advising poets to resist the temptation to write Aurobindian poetry, "The temptation to slip into greasy, weak-spined and purple-adjectived 'spiritual' poetry" has been adjudged by Naik of using vague symbolism and a style "cluttered up with stale romantic adjectives." It must be said that P. Lal did very early record his changed views about Aurobindo when he recommends that the new poets must make "the attempt to re-discover values and techniques within one's own tradition, however limited it may be." He knows he is "staging a volte-face" when he singles out "two poets - Sri Aurobindo and Bharati Sarabhai - to indicate that I mean by re-discovery and revaluation." He praises Aurobindo as "the only modern poet, in any Indian language, to have
attempted the large philosophical poem” and admires him for the “manner of philosophically transforming the Savitri story in the Mahabharata.”

He holds up Aurobindo’s credo that “death in one’s own dharma is better; it is a dangerous thing to follow the law of another’s nature.”

Little wonder then that in another essay Lal should write that “no Indian writer... should commit pen to paper until he has spent ten years of his adult life carefully pondering the Indian classics, learning the Indian tradition, and absorbing the Indian myth.”

He sees that the crucial difference between nineteenth and early twentieth century Indian English writers and post-Independence writers is that the earlier writers were “familiar with their mother tongues or with Sanskrit to be able to enter into the stream of Indian tradition if they wanted to” whereas the latter are not.

This has led him to undertake “transcreations” of the Ramayana and the Mahabharatha, very much like the nineteenth century Indian English poets like R.C. Dutt! It is this changed attitude that leads C.N. Srinath to say that “Lal’s poetry at his best, not to speak of his translations from Sanskrit poetry, has a play of sensibility that is Indian” whereas Ezekiel’s poems “generally speaking... give no indication of the poet’s Indian sensibility which... is Mr. Ezekiel’s serious limitation; serious limitation, because it leaves the poet drifting and without an anchor.”

This interpretation of Indian sensibility to equate it with intimate knowledge of Hindu scriptures and way of life is one of the bugbears of Indian English criticism. But Srinath doesn’t exaggerate when he says in his translations that “Mr. Lal has achieved better poetry than in his original compositions.”

It goes almost without saying that
Lal too tried his hand at socially relevant verse in his volume "Change: They Said" (1966) which shows "a widening of range to include city images, atom tests, and refugees." He also did go on to write Calcutta: A Long Poem (1977) which Naik dismisses as "fragmentary and casual." Lal’s poetic career is another illustration of an other Indian English poet’s search for his/her India.

The poet Ezekiel is usually compared with is A.K. Ramanujan whose work, as we have already noted, according to R. Parthasarathy "offers the first indisputable evidence of the validity of Indian English verse." In a significant passage on his fellow-poet Parthasarathy writes:

[Ramanujan’s works]
are the heir of an anterior tradition, a tradition very much of the subcontinent, the deposits of which are in Kannada and Tamil and which have been assimilated into English. Ramanujan’s deepest roots are in the Kannada and Tamil past, and he has repossessed that past, in fact, made it available, in the English language. I consider this a significant achievement, one almost without millions a parallel in the history of Indian English verse. Ramanujan has, it seems to me, successfully conveyed in English, what at its subtlest and most incantatontal, is locked up in another linguistic tradition.

Bruce King in a curiously worded statement says that Ramanujan’s "poetry blends the techniques and conventions of European, Indian, American and British Literatures, with those of Kannada, Tamil and Sanskrit." The curiosity is in the four separate categories - Indian, Kannada, Tamil and Sanskrit! More reasonably King observes that as a translator and scholar of Kannada and Tamil, Ramanujan “has been
influenced by their conventions and problems of translating Indian classical and medieval verse into modern English. He also says that in A.K. Ramanujan’s poetry (talking of his past two volumes), “There is a Tamil and Indian nationalist not far below the surface and, as with many nationalists, the perspective has been created by going outside the culture and looking at it from abroad.” Satyanarain Singh making a direct comparison of Ramanujan and Ezekiel says that “While Ramanujan’s poetry bears the aura of Hindu tradition and is evocative of the Indian family scene, it is difficult to identify any specific tradition in Ezekiel, although some of his poems glimpse forth aspects of urban living in India.” Paul Verghese however feels that:

A remarkable feature of Ezekiel’s poetry as also of the poetry of A.K. Ramanujan and Parthasarathy is that there is no ambivalence in their attitude to India; in no uncertain terms do they give poetic utterance to their commitment to India.

He then differentiates A.K. Ramanujan’s poetry by saying that with poets like him “the commitment to India is not merely a sense of belonging but a commitment to her history and heritage.” Sudesh Mishra too feels that in his poetry “Ramanujan shows ample evidence of a poet who is being constantly translated by indigenous literary conventions.” A. K. Ramanujan’s own words on his influences are worth re-reading:

English and my disciplines (linguistics, anthropology) give me my “outer” forms - linguistic, metrical, logical and other such ways of shaping experience; and my first thirty years, my frequent visits and field trips, my personal and professional preoccupation with Kannada, Tamil, the classics and folklore give me my substance, my “inner”
forms, images and symbols. They are continuous with each other, and I no longer can tell what comes from where.

Arvind Krishna Malhotra uses the last line from the above quotation to quarrel with Parthasarathy’s reading of Ramanujan though he does say that linguistic and cultural boundaries are “soft borders” for Ramanujan and that his Indian languages influence Ramanujan’s English as much as his English influenced his Kannada.

Ramanujan’s India is thus seen as an India of tradition - but it is an India of alternate tradition Ramanujan has pointed out how the Virasaiva poets in the Kannada bhakti tradition were iconoclasts who wrote an informal Kannada and used free verse and unconventional prosody:

The strictness of traditional metres, the formality of literary genres, divisions of prose and verse, gave way to the innovations of spontaneity of free verse, a poetry that was not recognizably in verse. The poets were not bards or pundits in a court but men and women speaking to men and women.

These poets were anti-establishment, opposed to all orthodoxies, believing that establishments tend to impose order, which by definition is false, on the world. Order is false because God is unpredictable. Mishra says that it can be discovered “how closely related the vacana is to modernist lyric poetry.” Of course, this is an established “counter tradition, literature of unorthodoxy.”

Ramanujan’s India is an India of alternate traditions, but an India of the particularities of family life. Mishra isolates six signature personae in Ramanujan’s poetry: “the neurotic Hindu, the sardonic husband or lover;
the wry chronicler of family matters; the disembodied consciousness of the imagist poems; the self-reflexive ironist; and the pseudo-bhakta as parodist. But these are not necessarily clearly defined absolutely split personae - the neurotic Hindu could also be the husband and chronicler of family matters. The poet who writes, and the persona who says:

But, sorry, I cannot unlearn

covenants of despair.
They have their pride
I must seek and will find

My particular hell only in my hindu mind.
(“Conventions of Despair”)

is the same who confesses:

I burned and burned. But one day I turned
and caught that thought
by the screams of her hair
Bred Brahmin among singers of shivering hymns
I shudder to the bone at hungers that roam the street
beyond the constable - beat...

... Commandments crumbled
in my father’s past. Her tumbled hair suddenly known
as silk in my angry hand, I shook a little
and took her, behind the laws of my land.
(“Still Another View of Grace”)

and the same who chronicles the family to say:

It’s time I told you why
I’m so gentle, do not hurt a fly.

why, I cannot hurt a spider,
either, not even a black widow,

For who can tell Who’s Who?
Can you? May be it’s once again my
great swinging grand mother,
and that other (playing at
patience centered in his web)
my one true ancestor,
the fisherman lover who waylaid her
on the ropes in the Madras harbour
(“The Hindoo: he doesn’t Hurt a Fly or a Spider
either”)

To take one example the poem often seen as Ramanujan’s
celebration of family life, “Small Scale Impressions on a Great House”, a
poem which showcases the “assimilatory power of a capacious India” is
more complex than a straight reading would suggest. In Mishra’s
reading the house as parallels and is an extension of India.

Sometimes I think that nothing
That ever comes into this house
goes out. Things come in every day

To lose themselves among other things
lost long ago amona
other things lost long ago.

This is “timeless” India which encompasses all and which has to pay a
price for even its “exports”:

And also, anything that goes out
will come back, processed and often
with long bills attached,

Like the hooped bales of cotton
shipped off to invisible Manchester
and brought back milled and folded

for a price...
But this celebratory poem begins with things losing themselves and goes on to talk of "unread library books", and "the epilepsies of the blood" and daughters who "get married to short-lived idiots" and dead bodies of soldiers, one of whom, "a nephew with stripes on his shoulder was called/ an incident on the border" came back "on a perfectly good/chatty afternoon.". The "I" of the first line, "Sometimes I think" disappears after that in this chaos that is seen as tradition and continuity.

Ramanujan's India is not a carnivalesque space, is not a celebratory space - it is a pluralistic, but overwhelming culture. His India is one of families which assign you spaces but which can also imprison or debilitating you.

As King writes "Ramanujan's memories are located in the specific society of Tamil Brahmins. The poems avoid vague generalizations about India and are set in particular situations or scenes or develop from reflections on specific topics."\textsuperscript{155} But, King point out, that while Ramanujan shows and evokes "the warmth of traditional Indian family life and the closeness of long remembered relationships, more often he shows conflict, arguments, surprises; he also shows that the supposed glory of the Tamil cultural heritage is a fiction which ignores the reality of the past."\textsuperscript{156} His India is one of memory but not of nostalgia. His India is a complex entity but an India of continuity - he too sings of the river like both the old and the new poets:

\textlsuperscript{108} The new poets still quoted  
The old poets, but no one spoke  
in verse  
of the pregnant woman  
drowned, with perhaps twins in her  
("A River")
but Ramanujan constructs his insider-outsider space to be able to record that:

the river has water enough
to be poetic
about only once a year
and then
it carries away
in the first half-hour
three village houses,
a couple of cows
named Gopi and Brinda
and one pregnant woman
expecting identical twins

("A River")

Ramanujan is one of the poets whose distance from India enables and sustains this insider-outsider status as much as the English language does. Little wonder that in Naik's judgement Ramanujan's "articulation of the Hindu ethos has ... produced (with a few notable exceptions) poetry of the periphery and not of the centre of the Hindu experience." Naik feels that Ramanujan's poetry is "severely restricted to the social plane of experience alone, seldom attempting higher or more subtle evocations..." He also writes that Ramanujan "reveals a curious uncertainty in his reaction to Hinduism."

One may quarrel with Naik's judgement - both its content and its premises. But what is of interest is that the two poets discussed above - Ezekiel and Ramanujan - are usually contrasted in terms of their religion and Ramanujan is seen as being central to the Hindu mainstream. William Walsh for instance remarks that "Ramanujan... is, unlike Ezekiel,
deeply possessed of, or by, the Indian ethos and psyche in its pure Hindu form. Even if we accept this in its entirety one cannot but disagree with his next sentence that Ramanujan "therefore has none of the detachment from the Indian scene that one finds in Ezekiel." Ezekiel as we have seen is hardly "detached" from "the Indian scene" nor is Ramanujan devoid of objectivity, a clinical detachment. Perhaps the crucial difference between them is their resident status, Ezekiel lives in India and Ramanujan spent the better poetry-writing half of his life in America. While saying this it is important to remember what Makarand Paranjape says about Ramanujan while comparing him favourably to Spivak and Bhabha:

"... he never left India completely. He continued to write and publish in Kannada; he also continued to write in Indian journals and publications. Certainly, he was part of the intellectual life of India, even if only as a yearly visitor. He was neither imprisoned by the West, nor was he ever exiled from India. The West was merely a geographical and material location for his plural sensibility..."

While Ezekiel writes about an India which is his geographical and material location, Ramanujan wrote about an India which contributed to his identity, but an India in which he was not immediately located. Thus the quality of his involvement was different. This urgency, immediacy, can be felt in the poetry of Indian poets who are located here in India. There are things to change, social issues to grapple with, statements to make. This may be articulated in personal terms, like Ramanujan, but the location of the poet alters the quality of utterance as much as the poetic
sensibility does. To see a marked contrast one only has to take the poetry of Kamala Das but this is true of other poets as well.

Kamala Das’s poetry brings to our attention an India of feminine discontentment - an India which has always been simmering below the surface but dramatically breaks through in her poetry. Das emphasises that her persona and her poetry are Indian, not some western import or construct:

I am Indian, very brown, born in
Malabar, I speak in three languages, write in
Two, dream in one.

("An Introduction")

According to Mishra, Kamala Das “disdains all attempts to draw parallels between her poetry and that of the confessional poets of America. She contends that her literary genealogy is traceable to the bhakti poets, especially those like Mahadeviakka and Mira Bai.”162 This stress on continuity should be contrasted with critical assessment like E.V. Ramakrishnan’s which treats her as a confessional poet in the western tradition and places her in the lineage of “Lowell, Plath, Sexton, Roethke, Berryman, and Ginsberg.”163 Ramakrishnan then finally goes on to say that Kamala Das lacks a “unifying stream”, has to find an objective correlative “which is not possible theme-wise or through a sensibility that engages traditional rhetoric for its expression.”164 Kamala Das differs from such a view. Her poetry which draws on the Krishna-Radha myth also belies such generalisations that her poetry like that of other post-Independence women “had moved on from such colonial and nationalist
themes as the rewriting of legends, praise of peasants, and from general ethical statements to writing about personal experiences." \(^{165}\) Not only does her poetry draw its sustenance from tradition which includes bhakti poetry with its highly personal utterances, it also shares in its ethics. On the other hand, one can hear the personal voice in earlier poets as well. Srinivasa Iyengar in a masterly discussion of The Temple which is the last section of Sarojini Naidu’s last book of poems The Broken Wing, argues that it is the immediacy of her loss that silences the poet. \(^{166}\) The poetic idiom is different but the urgency of recrimination to an ex-lover is palpable in the following lines:

```
The tumult of your own wild heart shall smite you
With strong and sleepless pinions of desire
The subtle hunger in your veins shall bite you
With swift and unrelenting fangs of fire
When youth and spring passion shall betray you
And mock your proud rebellion with defeat,
God knows, O Love, if I shall save or slay you
As you lie spent and broken at my feet!
(Naidu, “The Menace of Love”)
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Sarojini Naidu too uses the Radha-Krishna myth to speak of the woman’s quest for the eternal even as Kamala Das does later.

King correctly points out that “many of her (Das’s) poems are about the warmth of her childhood and the family home in Kerala”. Comparing her to other South Indian poets he finds her similar to them in that “she writes of memories of childhood, family relations and the family’s great house.” \(^{167}\) It is noteworthy that his list of South Indian poets is “Ramanujan, Parthasarathy, Meena Alexander and Sharat
Chandra” - all of whom have been displaced from their childhood locations to alien shores! Parthasarathy and Das demonstrate that India is vast and plural enough to contain alienness within itself. A summer in Calcutta is vastly different from a monsoon in Kerala. Parthasarathy can yearn for Madras and Tamil while still in India just as Kamala Das can yearn for Malabar or her grandmother’s house:

Yes, this is
A noon for wild men, wild thoughts, wild love. To
Be here, far away, is torture. Wild feet
Stirring up the dust, this hot noon, at my
Home in Malabar, and I so far away...

(Das, “A Hot Noon in Malabar”)

But she is mostly known for “the uninhibited frankness with which she talks about sex”, as Naik says, but he also points out that “she is simply ‘every woman who seeks love’”168; she is “the eternal Eve proudly celebrating her essential femininity”169. In Devendra Kohli’s words, “Kamala Das is essentially a poet of the modern Indian woman’s ambivalence giving expression to it more nakedly than any other Indian woman with the possible exception of Amrita Pritam in Punjabi”170. King would agree with this when he credits her with having “created a climate for a more honest, revelatory, confessional poetry by Indian women.”171 He says that “Das opened up areas in which previously forbidden or ignored emotions could be expressed in ways which reflect the true voice of feeling; she showed how an Indian woman poet could create a space for herself in the world”172. However, Mishra in his perceptive discussion stresses the continuity between Das’s poetry and bhakti poetry saying that “The Radha-Krishna cult of lovemaking, a genre of its own right within
the tradition of bhakti verse, affords a unifying dialectic to her poetry."^{173} He demonstrates how Das’s quest for Krishna ends in her equation of her husband with Krishna in “A Man is a Season”:

A Man is a season
You are eternity.
To teach me this, you let me toss my youth like coins
Into various hands, you let me mate with shadows,
You let me sing in empty shrines, you let your wife
Seek ecstasy in others’ arms.

Perhaps I lost my way, perhaps
I went astray. How would a blind wife trace her lost
Husband, how would a deaf wife hear her husband call?

The persona’s affairs thus ends in “the re-affirmation of dharma which she had earlier transgressed in her search for pyar in illicit relationships”^{174} which was after all a lila organised for her edification and education.

However one reads Kamala Das’s poetry, it is undeniable that she heralds a new confidence and felicity in the use of English and confidence in directly dealing with sexuality, and extends the India of Indian English poetry. This sense of continuously questioning and extending male and mainstream constructs of India can be seen in other women poets too. Mamta Kalia’s “Tribute to Papa” is a case in point:

who cares for you, Papa?
Who cares for your clean thoughts, clean words, clean teeth?

... You want me to be like you, Papa,
Or like Rani Lakshmibai.
You’re not sure what greatness is,
But you want me to be great,
I give two donkey-claps for your greatness.
And three for Rani Lakshmibai.

... Everything about you clashes with nearly everything about me,
You suspect I am having a love-affair these days.
But you're too shy to have it confirmed,
What if my tummy starts showing gradually
And I refuse to have it curetted?
but I'll be careful, Papa,
Or I'll know you'll at once think of suicide.

This poem also exemplifies the danger of reading women’s poetry as a different, hermetically sealed, constituency. The father is an idealist, an unsuccessful one, and the poet-persona exclaims “Who wants to be an angel like you?/Who wants it.” The father is castigated for materialistic failure, for not wangling “a cozy place in the world.” His “limited dreams” do not allow him to become a respectable smuggler. He is instead “Mr. Kapur, Lower Division Clerk, Accounts Section”. The poem thus turns the progressive rebellion of this particular feminist on the head—hers is also the selfish reaction of the me-first generation which quantifies success in material terms. Mamta Kalia brings to Indian English poetry what Eunice de Souza calls “Warmth, gaiety, and a kind of spiky wit”175 in lines such as:

I want to pays Sunday visits
totally undressed...
(“Compulsions”)

Give up all hope
Ye that enter the Kingdom of
Government service...
(“Hell”)
but nothing ever happened to me
except two children
and two miscarriages...

("Sheer Good Luck")

Nowhere is this “spiky wit” more in evidence than in her complaints about the effect of being a housewife:

I no longer feel that I’m Mamta Kalia
I’m Kamla
or Vimala
or Kanta or Shanta.
I cook, I wash,
I bear, I rear,
I nag, I wag,
I sulk, I sag.

("Anonymous")

While being aware of the pitfalls of the ghettoisation of women’s poetry, one must note that women poets have consistently questioned middle-class India and articulated a different vision:

Sometimes you want to talk
about love and despair
and the ungratefulness of children.
A man is no use whatever then.

(Gauri Deshpande, “The Female of the Species”)

Eunice de Souza with her Goan roots, and her expressed need to connect, once again gives us an India which makes us think anew of the nation:

Francis X. D’Souza
father of the year.
Here he is top left
the one smiling.
By the Grace of God he says
We’ve had seven children
(in seven years)
We’re One Big Happy Family
God Always Provides
India will suffer for
her Wicked Ways
(these Hindu beggars got no ethics)

Pillar of the Church
says the Parish priest
Lovely Catholic Family
says Mother Superior

the pillar’s wife
says nothing

(“Catholic Mother”)

This critique of Goan Catholics is present in her other poems as well. King lists the subjects she deals with in her early satires - “the church, marriage, Catholic motherhood, Indian colour prejudice, sexual prudery and hypocrisy, Goan vulgarity and the alienation felt by many Goan Catholics towards Hindu India.” but she is aghast at ignorance about Hindu India:

My Portuguese-bred aunt
picked up a clay shivalingam
one day and said:
Is this an ashtray?
No, said the salesman,
This is our god.

(“Conversation Piece”)

And she is pained at the attitudes to the poor:

Every Christmas we feed the poor,
We arrive an hour late: Poor dears,
Like children waiting for a treat,
Bring your plates...

....
You’re a good man, Robert, yes,
beggars can’t be, exactly

(“Feeding the Poor at Christmas”)

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She not only rejects her “roots”, she also affirms her sense of belonging to India, quite like Ezekiel:

No, I’m not going to
delve deep down and discover
I’m really de Souza Prabhu
even if Prabhu was no fool
and got the best of both worlds.
(Catholic Brahmin!
I can hear his fat chuckle still.)

No matter that
my name is Greek
my surname Portuguese
my language alien.

There are ways
of belonging.

I belong with the lame ducks.

She is in her “backward place” with “the lame ducks”. But is not being a non-Hindu but her anti-Catholicism that makes her a lame duck, as does her being a woman:

I heard it said
my parents wanted a boy.
I’oe done my best to qualify.
(“De Souza Prabhu”)

Being woman, being embroiderer (to echo Kamala Das) isn’t easy:

the limbs keep flopping
the sawdust keeps popping
out of the gaps
out of the gaps
out of the gaps
sister
(“Eunice”)
In this world, cats are preferable to men:

That stare of perpetual surprise
in those great green eyes
will teach you
to die alone

("Advice to Women")

Eunice de Souza is aware of the marginality of the Indian English poet even if she satirizes this view:

My students think it funny
that Daruwallas and de Souzas
should write poetry.
Poetry is faery lands forlorn.
Women writers Miss Austen.
Only foreign men air their crotches.

The prevalent view is that only foreigners can write poetry and only men about sexuality! Curiously the poets named, perhaps for alliteration, are non-Hindus, but a Hindu name (Das, for example) shouldn’t make much difference to the line. Eunice de Souza too makes an overt gesture of commitment, asserts her connectedness to Indian traditions when she addresses Sant Tukaram in "Return: Section V":

Tuka, forgive my familiarity,
I have loved your pithy verses
....
The priests do not sound like you
but I’ll offer a coconut anyway
for someone I love.
You made life hard for your wife
and I’m not sure I approve of that.
Nor did you heed her last request:
Come back soon.
Eunice de Souza's seeming control does not dilute the sense of immediacy, the reaction brought about by her location in the environment she is writing about. Arvind Krishna Mehrotra's angry outburst Bharatmata - A Prayer is only one of the ways of reacting to your surrounding:

india
my beloved country, ah my motherland
you are in the world's slum
the lavatory

the septic tanks where in paper gutters
fall the
marks roubles dollars pounds yens liras francs
yet our stomachs remain sirens
tooting pathetic messages

According to King in spite of “the references to beggars, western women and pot-bellied children Bharatmata is less an angry howl than a mixture of literary jokes and social satire on the Indian urban middle-class and their culture”. Even if another critic, Nita Pillai, is correct in her view that “the poem in its entirety is adolescent and self-conscious”, Bharatmata illustrates how many Indian English poets have felt the need to address the nation directly - even post-Independence poets. It also illustrates, by parody and satire, the urban middle-class nature of the concerns and the world of these poets:

male: is engineer
doctor
administrator
(age 30)
female: part-time wife
(age 25)
children: 4 yr. old son who recites
little hack horner
learnt at the
English Primary School +
2 yr. old daughter
each house complete
with
refrigerator
transistor
telephone
car
record player
a newly married sofa set.

It is again important to note that this seemingly surrealist poet who
is quoted as saying that a poem may consist of “games, riddles and
accidents”179 was also to claim that “To a poem the location - whether
cultural, geographical, or fictive - is everything.”180 He too turns to
childhood and to Allahabad for the material of his poetry. Even in his
early phase this insistence on locale - specific as well as general i.e.
immediate as well as larger - can be seen, as in bharatmata. Even in “The
Book of Common Places” Mehrotra goes on to give a history of India
from the Aryan entry to that of the European invasions:

My childhood
Wanders off into the family tree,
And the tree gets lost
In the North.
I’m told we followed the tracks
Left by none in particular,
The horse was our animal,
And once in the plains.
We settled among the rivers.

Then a few shops
filled with white traders
Swung around the Cape
And sighted the West Coast.
They redid the land
From sea to sea.

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This need to construct one’s India, this attempt to construct one’s own space is thus seen in later poets as well, even one publishing in the 1990s like Tabish Khair. This young poet’s aptly titled first collection, *My World*, gives us vignettes of Gaya:

There are hills near my house, wearing a halo of eagles; Brown, bare hills- not towering white or spreading green, Barren, blasted hills with eruptions of black and red stones Pushing through the earth like old and festering wounds.

There are some temples too, where the bells shriek sometimes; Temples standing immobile as custom, implacable as death In all its squashed cockroachlike repulsiveness This is all my town has to show for a thousand centuries (“My Town”)

Khair writes of the particularities of his life, his neighbourhood, his family, his sense of non-belonging:

You will leaf through the family photos after dinner, The album of all your missed years, and faintly feel Why there will always be something missing (“Home Coming”)

He doesn’t belong anywhere, but he feels he could:

Sometime it must be comy to belong, to be categorized and filed neatly Into the various shelves of mankind - Muslim or Hindu, Bihari, Tamil or Punjabi. I am sure I could belong somewhere (“By the Traffic Lights”)

It is this desire to belong to more than constricting categories that motivates the poems, the recording of daily life, and the travels around India as in the long poem “My India Diary” which starts from Gaya and
goes on to Calcutta, Agra, Jaipur, Bombay, and Madras where in spite of its:

- strange tongues
- strange faces
- strange smells
- vermillioned foreheads jasmined hair
- it all seems to strangely familiar.

The Indian English poets India is “strangely familiar” - estranged and familiarised by their situation and vision.

Jayanta Mahapatra who Sarang calls “a phenomenon of special significance”\textsuperscript{181} is another case in point. Sarang notes that “The Orissa Landscape - with Konarak and Puri looming large - has a strong presence in the poetry of Mahapatra: the funeral pyres burn unceasingly on the banks of Mahapatra’s poetic world.”\textsuperscript{182} King says that “While Mahapatra’s world is filled with personal pain, guilt, remorse, hunger, desire and moments of renewal, his environment is filled with symbols of belief by the ordinary lives of the people of Cuttack, the temples, the Hindu festivals, the ancient monuments.”\textsuperscript{183} This poetic environment is again constructed in answer to the need to make one’s own space, one’s own India. Mahapatra’s sense of displacement stems from his Christianity, a legacy from his grand father who had to embrace Christianity while starving during the famine of 1866:

The imperishable that swung your broken body,
turned it inside out? What did faith matter?
What Hindu world so ancient and true for you to hold?
Uneasily you dreamed toward the centre of your web.
The separate life let you survive, while perhaps
the one you left wept in the blur of your heart.

We wish we knew what is was to be, against dying,
to know the dignity

that had to be earned dangerously.
Your last chance that was blindly terrifying, so unfair,
We wish we had not to wakeup with our smiles
in the middle of some social order
("Grandfather")

But it is not just his grandfather who as "invisible piece on a board" has
displaced him, the time itself is out of joint - the poverty and the
degradation around him are beyond understanding:

Here is my world, and it makes me dream as a child.
Yet why do I wear myself out
   feeling for the girls who die
before their breasts are swollen with milk?

Why am I hurt still
by the look in the hand
   of that graceful Naxal girl
who appeared out of nowhere that winter,
holding a knife as old as history?

Sometimes at night
when all voices die
my mind sees earth, my country -
to accept sacrifice, the loss of friends,
and sons who vanished
   suddenly in seventy-two.
However much I provoke and curse
I am unable to force an answer out of you
   Wherever I try to live,
in pious penitence at Puri
or in the fiery violence of a revolutionary
my reason becomes a prejudiced sorrow
   like socialism.

And not understanding myself.
not understanding you,
Like the still, strange shapes of hills in the distance,
I, too, listen to the faraway wailing of hyenas
aware of the dying countryside around them,
tortured by hunger and the reek of decay in the air
after the age-old myths
have been told all over again.
(“A Country”).

Though Mahapatra is often seen as a metaphysical poet, a Romantic,
Mishra rightly says that Mahapatra’s Romanticism is that “of a man who
would like to sing of hills and dales, but who is thwarted by a sensibility
attuned to the grim realities of rural India arrested in a changing yet
changeless moment in history.”

This transcendental poet is also a poet of Orissa, one who has a sense of historical continuouum as exemplified
in the line on the Puri Temple in “Main Temple Street, Puri” : “The
temple points to unending rhythm.”

Time and again Mahapatra writes of
the will to live of the Oriya people :

A time-inherited people, living amidst temples and shrines,
with their fairs and festivals, feasts and fasting, and
growing through disastrous cyclones and famines into
deep-rooted tradition of their ancestors. Look into the
faces trudging along the dusty, pitted roads - perhaps faces
of bodies that have been going without proper food for
days - you will notice that their eyes are quick and warm
and alive, like tamps burning, throwing around them their
tiny worlds of beaten gold.

The poems that he writes about this people and this landscape are easily
accessible, not so his personal spiritual poems. King feels that
Mahapatra’s “is a difficult, often obscure poetry of meditation... It is a
poetry of inner spaces, of psychology... Many poems seem sealed against
interpretation.”

Mehrotra feels that “Mahapatra’s work is a meditation
on a simple theme: the daily tragedy of having to wake up in a sun-filled room.¹⁸⁷ This existential aspect is located securely in the writer’s personal history as well as his country’s and culture’s. This is clear in all his poetry and even more so in Relationships, his epic attempt to write a long poem which would embody the myths of his culture - the history, mythology and legend of Orissa. He has to connect his spiritual life with the environment - “I know I can never come alive if I refuse to consecrate at the altar of my origins.” This poem affirms historical continuity - and his sense of belonging - “Fear of my guilt, I bid you farewell.” However alienated he may feel, he not only finds his place in India, he is moved to react with immediacy to any disturbance elsewhere in the land - e.g. he has poems on Bhopal and Punjab.

This sense of immediacy, a sense of involvement can be discerned in K.N. Daruwalla’s poetry as well. As Michael Hulse says “Daruwalla is not a poet for readers (Anglo or Indian) who want an India transcendentalised beyond the everyday facts. His keynotes are disillusion and despair...”¹⁵⁸ Parthasarathy refers to Darruwalla’s “bitter, satiric tone” and notes that “The landscape of northern India - hills, plains and rivers - is evoked in many poems...” Keki Daruwalla has himself said that for him “poetry is first personal” but “At the same time it has to be a social gesture, because on occasions I feel external reality bearing down on me from all sides with a pressure strong enough to tear my ear-drums.” He then says that his “poems are rooted in landscape... (which) is not merely there to set the scene but to lead to an illumination.” For him “a riot-stricken town is a landscape.”¹⁹⁰ Mehrotra says dismissively of
Daruwalla’s early poetry that it “is concerned with things teleprinters are busy with: floods, famines, riots, and anniversaries. That the news is delivered in verse should make all the difference, but seldom does.”¹⁹¹ This seems very much like King’s criticism of earlier Indian English poets and their poetry of nationalism, even as criticism of Mahapatra’s poetry echoes the post-Independence criticism of Aurobindo-like mystical poetry! Sarang praises Daruwalla for precisely these qualities.

“Daruwalla stands out amongst Indian English poets for bringing to poetry a range of experience generally outside the ambit of poets. His profession - he is a police officer - has clearly helped him in this. He puts his experience of active life to good use... He brings alive the world of riot and curfew, sirens, warrants, men nabbed at night, lathi blows on cowering bodies, “the starch on your cowering back.” Soda bottles and acid bottles waiting on the rooftops, press communiqués. The contemporary Indian socio-political world - not merely of the city, but also of small town, village and the countryside - is portrayed with heavy strokes, laden with savage irony...”¹⁹²

Daruwalla’s world is that of a police officer’s but it is also the world of a thinking poet who identifies himself as Indian simply because he cannot locate himself in any of the existent localised categories:

I am neither a good Parsi - hardly ever having lived like one, nor a hindu or a muslim. The same goes for culture - I am neither a Punjabi nor a Gujarat or a U.P. man. A bit of everything which really means nothing.¹⁹³

As he says in his reply to P.Lal’s questionnaire, Daruwalla “hopped across half the continent” during his years of education and his transferable job as a police officer kept him on the move later.¹⁹⁴ So this poet too constructs his location, his India, in his poetry. He belongs to
this world and he can critique it for this world belongs to him unquestionably. He may thus address India angrily as Mother "who will crawl towards Benaras to die" and call her "one vast, sprawling defeat" ("Collage II"). He is after all the policeman whose routine it is to wear "The putties left behind by the Raj" who has to walk into "a ring of abuse ("Routine") and is the only one to point his barrel into the crowd and shoot - "The rest aim into the sun!" He can note that during a curfew "Two days have passed/without turning up a corpse" ("Curfew in a Riot-torn city") and put down with despair that legal proprieties cannot be met:-

How can I explain
that there cannot be evidence.
For when the state rapes
the streets are empty.
("Variations")

This is an India where a frantic request for "Rice Specials at once!" is replied to with the message:

silo owners have gone off for the night
despatching armed police instead.
("Hunger 74")

This official India never changes, the hypocrisy of the politicians and the duplicity of the bureaucrats never ceases to amaze and desire:

the hospital floors are marblewhite
black bodies dirty them
nurses in white habits
unicef jeeps with white bonnets
doctors with white faces receive them
"who says they have cholera?
they are down with diarrhea
who says it is cholera?
it is gastro-enteritis
who says they have cholera?
("Pestilence")

Daruwalla's poetry is not merely the recording of apathy or atrophy. He engages with religions (Hinduism, Islam, and zoroastrianism) and practices as well but his tone is always that of a non-believer, a humanistic non-believer. His Crossing of the Rivers is a wonderful collection of poems on the Gange and on Benares. As Michael Hulse says "In poetry, this sacred place of the Hindus has never yet been registered by a sensibility at once so exactingly and even cynically undeluded and so humanly sensitive." In "Boat-ride Along the Ganges" the first poem in this collection, he listens to the panda's legends:

striving to forget what I chanced to see
the sewer-mouth trained like a cannon
on the river's flank. It is as I feared,
hygiene is a part of my conscience and I curse it
and curse my upbringing which makes me queasy here.

Daruwalla cannot belong in this world, he cannot even place it:

What plane of destiny have I arrived at
where corpse-fires and cooking-fires
burn side by side?

He can only see that "the Ganges flows swollen with hymns."

("Vignette I") and feel that:

The Ganga flows through the land,
not to lighten the misery
but to show it

("Vignette I")
He cannot enter this life, only observe that:

Women do not take off their saris
as they enter the water,
men leave their clothes behind.
The dead leave their bodies
("Vignette II")

But he cannot leave Benaras and all this behind. because:

All cities are the same at night
when you walk barefoot
across their blistered backs
("Vignette III")

The deeper impulse is as Vrinda Nabar points out:

... the resolution of conflicts. It is a coming to terms with
environment and culture, a spiritual purgation which the
visit to - and dip in - the Ganges exemplifies at the
metaphoric level.196

King however points out that "Daruwalla seldom appears at ease
among the passivity, fatalism and rituals of Hindu culture"197 and that "He
has a fascination for passionate commitment which involves dedication,
violence such as he finds, and would appear to identity with, in Muslim
culture."198 King finds substantiation for the latter statement in poems
like the "Sixth Moharram, Lucknow" where Darruwalla declares:

Before passions such as this
you can only offer humility!
They have awaited Moharram
Like a tree aching for leaf!
They long for him to walk
the fire bed of their dreams!
And even as the body shrivels like a pig
they met their tips with your name, Husain!
But this is an over-reading for Darruwalla does remain the poet who can make a persona say:

And if you probe
under the skin what does it promise us
for being humble and truthful, and turning
towards Kaaba five times a day.
weeping in Moharram and fasting in Ramadan?
What does it promise us except
that free-ridden bags that we are
we will end up as splendid corpses?
("Apothecary")

Daruwalla’s is a clinical view of India, the detached view of a policeman, but there is also a sense of commitment to the land and the people, an expressed need to belong, to be “something” where he is. This explains his intense engagement with the socio-cultural landscape.

This clinical detachment can be easily discerned in the poetry of the doctor-poet Gieve Patel, who has recounted “The Ambiguous Fate of Gieve Patel, He Being Neither Muslim Nor Hindu in India”. He feels that India has been defined in terms of Islam and Hinduism (because of the partition) and says ironically that “to be no part of this hate is deprivation.” He notes in “Naryal Pumima” that he sits:

Non-conformist, facing the sea, my back set
To the rich and the less rich as they come
Scrubbed and bathed, carrying a dirty little satchel
With a nut for the gods.

His sympathies are with the poor “From the south, poised black and lean/Against a blinking sea” who hope to catch these very coconuts thrown into the sea. Patel asks:
Do I sympathise merely with the underdog?
Is it one more halt in the search for “identity”?

His is the lot of Parsis, says Sarang: “The Parsi is seen as caught between two worlds; the pattern of the predicament recurs”:\footnote{199}

Our interiors never could remain
Quite English. The local gods hidden in
Cupboards from rational Parsi eye

Would suddenly turn up on the wall
Garlanded alongside the King and the Queen

To make matters worse (!) “the rulers who had such praise for our manners/disappeared one day”. The only recourse for Parsis is “to look instead for something else:/Even accept and belong.” This is difficult as the poet testifies and what he has to do is to construct his own space of belonging:

My present identities dive, snatch libations
From under god’s nose.

Like Patel, Jussawalla - who too is a Parsi - searches for and constructs his missing identity. While Patel turns to the immediately and minutely physical as the only verifiable and believable, Jussawalla places himself in the history of the post-colonial world. Sarang says that Jussawalla “reveals himself as a poet with the strongest awareness of contemporary social and political realities.”\footnote{200} Jussawalla has said of his \textit{Missing Person} that it:

\begin{quote}
\small
presents a problem, the guilt of the bourgeois intellectual.
It does not get out of the problem. The uniqueness of the poem is representing the Indian bourgeois intellectual, with links to other third world bourgeois intellectuals.\footnote{201}
\end{quote}
Mehrotra says that “The sequence maps an area of historical rifts few Indian poets have looked at.”\textsuperscript{202} King says that “Jussawalla’s poems are preoccupied with alienation, with not being part of the society in which he lives and with the emotional need to be part of a community.”\textsuperscript{203} Jussawalla has himself said that he did not like living abroad and had in his poems written there “tried to show the effects of living in lands I can never love properly nor belong to.”\textsuperscript{204} The fact that he felt out of place in India as well contributes to his political position in the \textit{Missing Persons}:

You’re your country’s lost property  
with no office to claim you back.

and

We’re themix  
Marx never knew  
would make the best communists.

Jussawalla wants to work towards a changed India, but is aware that this country is home to all, softening all responses:

Still,  
communities tear and reform; and still a breeze,  
cooling our garrulous evenings, investigates nothing,  
Ruffles no tempers, uncovers no root  
And settles no one adrift of the mainland’s histories.  
(“Sea Breeze, Bombay”)

But he asks “Restore us to fire” - he wants a new historical awareness. Mishra traces Jussawalla’s growth from a poet who shifts “away from an earlier position of play for play’s sake to one of play for the sake of social
commentary."  His poetic career is almost typical of the Indian English poet's - from a rejection of Indian roots or a non-engagement to an affirmation and exploration of Indianness, a construction of the poet's own space. As King says "continuing to reject his upper-middle-class Indian Parsi upbringing but no longer attempting to insert himself into an already dated European Catholic revivalism, Jussawalla... can only write with an historical awareness of his own situation." 

This engagement with India, with what constitutes India to them, is characteristic of Indian English poets whether they are abroad or in India. To take two recent examples of expatriates poets engaged with Indianness one has only to turn to the poetry of Agha Shahid Ali and Sujata Bhatt. Agha Shahid Ali's distance from India results in re-creations of what he has left behind but which still informs him, is part of his life. The distance enables control over his material and he is aware of the drawbacks of this distance and control:

Kashmir shrinks into my mailbox,  
my home a neat four by six inches.  
I always loved neatness. Now I hold  
the half-inch Himalayas in my hand.

This is home. And this the closest  
I'll ever be to home. When I return,  
the colors won't be so brilliant,  
the Jhelum's waters so clean,  
so ultramarine, My love  
so overexposed.

An my memory will be a little  
out of focus, in it  
a giant negative, black,  
and white, still undeveloped.  
("Postcard from Kashmir")
Distance exposes the love, develops the memory. This is inevitable for India and his cultural roots cannot be wished away:

Can you rinse away this city that last
Like blood on the bitten tongue?
(“Chandni Chowk, Delhi”)

He asserts his right to his Urdu heritage - to Faiz Mohmed Faiz and Begum Akhtar, Ghalib and Mir. He too writes about his family, tracing and constructing his history in poems like “A Lost Memory of Delhi”, “A Dream of Glass Bangles”, “Snowmen”, “Cracked Portraits”, “Story of a Silence” and “The Season of Plains.” For Agha Shahid Ali, like A.K. Ramanujan, India is the family and cultural life, and an absence in his present life:

I close my eyes. It doesn’t leave me,
the cold moon of Kashmir which breaks
into my house

and steals my parents’ love

I open my hands:
empty, empty. This cry is foreign.

“When will you come home?”
Father asks, then asks again
(“A Call”)

Sujata Bhatt too explores her past-Indian life - in order to create her own space, a space that links her past and present. Like other Indian poets writing abroad any sense of urgency that her “Indian” poems have has to do with a present personal predicament. Mostly India is at a distance, reflected on. There is greater acceptance in her poems than in
those of Indian women writing in India. In "Udaylee" for example where she speaks of the separation of the menstruating women. From the rest of the household for fear of pollution:

Only paper and wood are safe
from a menstruating women's touch.

she goes on to observe that this forced exile “gives a chance/for our kitchen-scarred fingers to heal”. The poem then goes on to speak of femininity, fertility:

This gushing is my blood flowing against,
rushing against something -
knotted clumps of my blood,
So I remember fistfuls of torn sea weed
rising with the foam,
rising. Then falling, falling up on the sand
strewn over newly laid turtle eggs.

Her memories of childhood are a comfort and a paradigm even if humorously so as in “Shérdi” where oral sex reminds her of learning “to eat sugar cane in Sanosra”! All her relatives and swamis are benign, encouraging (“Swami Angad”, “For Nanabhai Bhatt”). It is the loss of language that moves her most, that troubles her the most in this reconstruction of the India of her memories.

Her world is made up of very many international elements, her India a major foundational aspect of her life and world. Her muse wears a turban (To My Muse”) just as a young childhood friend would have done later is life with his religiously sanctioned long hair (“3 November 1984”). But this inspirational (even if this word doesn’t sit happily after
the title of the last poem) India is India at a distance, an India that has to be remembered and reconstructed, an India where grandfather is more important than Gandhiji ("For Nanabhai Bhatt").

From Derozio to Bhatt, an Eurasian in India to an Indian in Europe, the Indian English poet has always had to ensure that his/her identity as an Indian poet is reiterated and imprinted in the consciousness of the reader. The historical/political situation changes over this larger part of two centuries, as does the attitude to the language, and to poetic idiom. But the Indian English poet is still a displaced soul constructing or reconstructing India(s) that would accommodate his/her self. The nature of this reaffirmation and engagement with India and Indianness shows remarkable continuities over the years. Among the many things that M.K. Naik has said about Indianness is this definition of what it is to be an Indian writer - "it is to write with India in one's bones." India is not only in the bones of the Indian English poets, it is there in the poems they have written, occupying a visibly large space in their writings. Indian English poets construct their India(s) at the same time as they struggle with, justify, and Indianize the English they write their poetry in. They have to construct their India because they write in English, a sense of displacement leading to a need to belong, a need for commitment.
Notes


4. See C. Paul Verghese, Problems, p.19, where he argues that in The Captive Ladie “the poet makes a conscious effort to use Indian imagery” and tell “an Indian story.”

5. In his note on “To the Missionaries of Fate”, Malabari states that the influence of missionaries, except in respect to proselytization, has been the making of India.

6. Verghese, Problems, p.7. He makes this observation with regard to Derozio’s attempt to be an Indian poet.


12. ibid., p.7.

13. ibid.

14. ibid.

15. R. Parthasarathy, Ten Twentieth Century Indian Poets, p.5.
16. ibid., p.4.
17. ibid., p.3
18. ibid., pp.6-7.
19. ibid., p.3.
20. ibid.
22. ibid, p.1.
23. ibid., p.7.
24. ibid., p.5.
26. ibid.
27. ibid., p.2.
28. ibid.
29. ibid.
30. ibid., pp.2-3.
31. ibid., p.3.
33. ibid.
34. ibid., p.26.
36. ibid.
37. ibid., p.41.
39. ibid., p.45.
40. ibid.
42. Susie Tharu and K. Lalita eds. Women Writing in India vol.1 (New Delhi: OUP, 1991) and vol.2 (New Delhi: OUP, 1995.)
44. ibid., p.53.
47. ibid.
50. ibid., p.52.
53. K. Srinivasa Iyengar, Indian Writing in English, p.204.
54. ibid., p.206.


59. *ibid.*

60. *ibid.*, p.33.


62. *ibid.*

63. *ibid.*

64. *ibid.*, p.35.


66. Quoted in Iyengar, p.150.


68. *ibid.*, p.80.

69. *ibid.*

70. *ibid.*, p.81.

71. *ibid.*


73. *ibid.*


77. ibid.
78. Verghese, Problems, p.43.
79. ibid.
82. ibid.
84. ibid.
87. ibid.
88. C. Paul Verghese, Problems, p.41.
90. C. Paul Verghese, Problems, p.42.
94. ibid., p.22.
95. Elena J. Kalinnikova, op.cit., p.65.


99. ibid., p.9.


101. ibid.

102. ibid.

103. ibid., p.71, and pp.143-46.


105. Bruce King, Modern Indian Poetry in English, p.92.

106. ibid.

107. ibid.


109. ibid., p.45.


111. John B. Beston, op.cit., p.44.


113. ibid.

114. ibid., p.xxii.

115. ibid.

116. Bruce King, Three Indian Poets, p.42.

117. ibid.

119. ibid.

120. Bruce King, *Three Indian Poets*, p.36.


123. Makarand Paranjape, op.cit., p.201.


125. Vilas Sarang, op.cit., p.17.


128. P. Lal, op.cit., p.xxxii.

129. ibid.

130. ibid., xxxii-xxxiii.

131. ibid., xxxiii.


133. ibid., p.17.

134. C.N. Srinath, “Contemporary Indian Poetry in English”, in *Contemporary Indian English Verse*, ed. Chirantan Kulshrestha, p.89.

135. ibid., p.88.

136. ibid., p.92.


140. ibid.

141. Bruce King, *Three Indian Poets*, p.61.

142. ibid.

143. ibid, p.79.


145. C. Paul Verghese, "Indian Poetry in English Today" in *Commonwealth Literature* eds. P.K. Rajan et al., p.98.

146. ibid.


151. ibid., p.231.

152. ibid.

153. ibid., pp.236-37.

154. ibid., p.256.

156. ibid.
158. ibid.
160. ibid.
164. ibid., p.207.
165. Bruce King, *Modern Indian Poetry*, p.147.
169. ibid, p.209.
172. ibid., p.152.
174. ibid., p.370.

146
175. Eunice de Souza, “Kamala Das, Gauri Deshpande, Mamta Kalia”, in *Contemporary Indian Poetry in English*, ed. Peeradina, p.84.


177. ibid., p.186.


182. ibid.


184. Sudesh Mishra, op.cit., p.344.

185. Quoted in Sudesh Mishra, p.344.


198. ibid., p.126.


200. ibid., p.20.


202. ibid.

203. Bruce King, *Modern Indian Poetry*, p.244.

204. ibid.

