CHAPTER - I

INDIAN ENGLISH POETRY AND THE WORK OF TORU DUTT, SAROJINI NAI DU AND KAMALA DAS
Indian English Poetry\(^1\) may be defined as that body of poetry written in the English Language by Indians.\(^2\) Indians write creatively in the various regional languages of India. Their writings constitute the poetry of the respective regional languages. All these several poetry\(^3\), including Indian English Poetry, collectively form what is known as Indian Poetry.

Indian English Poetry began to be written approximately a hundred and sixty years ago. The first known book of poems written in the English Language by an Indian, was brought out in the year 1827. It was a thin volume, titled 'Poems', and was published from Calcutta. The author was Henry Vivian Louis Derozio

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\(^1\) cf: M.K. Naik, *A History of Indian English Literature* (Sahitya Akademi, Delhi, 1982) p.5: "The Sahitya Akademi, has recently accepted 'Indian English Literature' as the most suitable appellation for this body of writing". Hence its poetry may be designated as 'Indian English Poetry'.

\(^2\) cf: *ibid.*, p. 2: 'Indians' means "by birth, ancestry or nationality ... There are exceptional cases like Ananda K. Coomaraswamy and Ruth Prawar Jhabwala. The former born of Sinhalese Indian father and an English mother was neither an Indian citizen nor did he live in India, and yet the entire orientation of his thought is so unmistakably Indian, that it is impossible not to consider him an Indian English writer. As for Jhabwala, born of Polish parents and married to an Indian, lived in India for more than twenty years, and has written in English. Her works show such close familiarity and deep understanding of Indian social life that she has rightly found a place in the history of Indian English Literature. On the other hand, V.S. Naipaul's Indian ancestry is undisputed but yet he is so much of an outsider when he writes about India and Indians and yet so much of an insider when he deals with Carribean life and character, that there can be no two opinions on his rightful inclusion in the history of West Indian writing."

\(^3\) cf: K.R. Srinivasa Iyenger, *Indian Writings in English* (New Delhi, 1985), p. 3, "Indian Literature comprises several literatures - Assamese, Bengali, Gujarati, Hindi, Kashmiri, Kannada, Maithili, Marathi, Oriya, Punjabi, Sindhi, Tamil, Telugu, Urdu, Malayalam, Sanskrit, and Indian writing in English is but one of the voices in which India speaks..."
(1809-1831). Since then a considerable corpus of poetry written in the English Language by Indians has been produced.

Derozio was in fact only half-Indian, his father being a Portuguese and mother, a Bengali. Nevertheless Derozio was an ardent lover of India and its natural scenery. His poem 'The Fakir of Jungheera' (1828) shows a concern for the sad state of widowhood among the Brahmin families, and indicates a hope for their future. Here, a Brahmin widow Nuleeni is about to be consumed by the flames on the funeral pyre of her dead husband. Just then she is carried away by the Fakir, her former lover and the chief of the outlaws, and is thus provided a new lease of life. His other poems, notably 'The Harp of India' and 'To India' express his love of India and his disgust with her enslaved condition. For instance note a few lines from his poem, 'The Harp of India':

Why hang'st thou lonely on yon withered bough?
Unstrung for ever, must thou there remain?
... ... ...
May be by mortal wakened once again
Harp of my country, let me strike the strain.4

Another poet of this period, Kashiprasad Ghose (1809-1873) published his first volume of verse in 1830, just three years after Derozio published his. It was titled 'The Shair or Minsteral and Other Poems'. Like Deorzio, Kashiprasad was also an ardent lover of India and her natural scenery. To put it in Ghose's own words:

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"The music of the falling rain or of the rustling leaves attracted (my) attention, and in the obstruction of my mind which followed, I used to give vent to (my) feeling in verse".\(^5\) This love of natural beauty materialised into sweet lyrics. For instance witness a passage in which the poet describes the moon in September:

How like the breath of love the rustling breeze
Is breathing through the fragrant sandal trees!
How sad but sweet the Bulbul sings above
Like liquid silver yon soft-gliding stream
Wanders and glistens in the lunar beam,
Which like a modest maid, in love and fear
Shrinks half-reluctant, from the clasp so dear
Of frequent-heaving waves....\(^6\)

An equally noted poet of this period was Michael Madhusudan Dutt (1824-73). His noted poem, 'The Captive Ladie' (1849) narrates the story of the Rajput King, Prithviraj, and "his Lochinvar like abduction of the Kanoj King's daughter, and his unsuccessful battle with the Muslim invader ending in his own death and that of his queen."\(^7\)

However, the most remarkable poet to emerge during the following period was a young Bengali woman-Toru Dutt (1856-1877).\(^8\) A thorough professional in the English and French languages, her true

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\(^6\) Quoted in Iyenger, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 37.

\(^7\) M.K. Naik, \textit{A History}, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 25.

\(^8\) \textit{Infra.}, pp. 26-37, for a detailed analysis of Toru Dutt's poetical achievements.
poetic talent is best revealed in the volume of poems titled 'Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan' published posthumously in 1882. In this work she re-tells some of the great Indian legends in English from the original Sanskrit. Prof. C.D. Narasimhaiah is of the opinion that "so well told are these great tales of India that I should have no hesitation to prefer them to anything of their kind in English by any one else and I should like them read by children of all lands including our own."9

A new element, viz., the mystic element now enters Indian English Poetry - with the entry of Sri Aurobindo Ghose (1872-1950). Educated in England and proficient in English, Latin, Greek, Italian and German, Aurobindo came back to India and chose to live the life of a 'Mahayogi' and pursue his "life-long ambition to study Reality."10 The poet's long narrative poem 'Savitri' published posthumously in one edition in 1954 turns the story of Savitri, who married Satyavan, who was doomed to die upon the completion of the one year after their marriage, and then wins him from the hands of Death, Yama, by her exemplary show of devotion for her husband, into an allegory. Here Savitri is the power of true love allied to Satyavan who is truth. Together they conquer death.

A near contemporary, Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1914) holds a prominent place in Indian English Poetry. He began by translating

10 Rameshwar Gupta, Eternity in words - Sri Aurobindo's Savitri (Bombay, 1969), pp. 36-37.
his own Bengali poems into English. The one hundred and three poems translated by him under the title 'Gitanjali' (1913) won the Nobel prize for literature in 1913. Though 'Gitanjali' (Song Offering) is set in a religious tone, it is intensely lyrical and personal. The imagery is taken from nature. Clothed in the Radha-Krishna mythology, the poems are unified in the search for the spirit that lies within Nature and Man.

The next important poet who rose to prominence in this period was a woman, Sarojini Naidu (1879-1949). She was hailed as the Bharat-Kokila or The Nightingale of India. She was essentially a poet of passion and personal emotion and was truly rooted in the soil and soul of India.

However, by 1947 Indian English poetry had acquired a new currency. It is considered 'new' in the manner of expression than in content. The imagery, syntax and rhythm now respond to man's feeling of restlessness and growing impatience with the degraded socio-political environment. The poet has less time now to indulge in poetical fancies. He concentrated on depicting the "din and hubbub, the confusion and indecision". Although poetry continues to be lyrical and by and large personal, it is now written in precise, concrete even harsh lexis. This new 'experimentation' in poetry-writing

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12 cf: Ibid., p. 27.


14 Infra., pp. 38-48, for a detailed analysis of Sarojini Naidu's poetical achievement.

15 P. Lal, quoted in A.N.Dwivedi, ed. Indian Poetry in English, A Literary History and Anthology (New Delhi, 1980), p. 28.
by Indians does not however "create a hiatus between the old and the new"\textsuperscript{16} because it maintained a continuity of the Indian Tradition while giving "definition to the needs of the present."\textsuperscript{17}

The main figures associated with this 'new poetry' are Nissim Ezekiel (1924- ), P. Lal (1929- ), A.K. Ramanujam (1929- ), R. Parthasarathy (1934- ), Jayanta Mahapatra (1928- ), Keki N. Daruwalla (1937- ), Pritish Nandy (1947- ) and Kamala Das (1934- ).

Though Nissim Ezekiel's background\textsuperscript{18} makes him a natural outsider, he has made himself a part of Indian landscape and culture and with unfailing faith states: "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."\textsuperscript{19} His poem 'Night of the Scorpion' is a poem with deep significance etched in Indian ethos and its view of evil and suffering. For instance, the following few lines from the poem:

\begin{quote}
With every movement that the Scorpion made his poison moved in Mother's blood, they said.
May he sit still; they said.
May the sins of your previous birth
Be turned away tonight, they said.\textsuperscript{20}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{17} cf: A.N. Dwivedi, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 32.
\textsuperscript{18} cf: M.K. Naik, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 194: Ezekiel belongs to a Bene-Israel family which migrated to India generations ago.
\textsuperscript{19} Nissim Ezekiel, 'Naipaul's India and Mine' in Adil Jussawalla (ed.), \textit{New Writings in India} (Harmondsworth, 1974), p. 88.
P. Lal's verse collections, notably 'Draupadi and Jayadratha and Other Poems' (1960), 'Yakshi from Didarganj and Other Poems' (1969), 'The Man of Dharma and the Rasa of Silence' (1974), and 'Calcutta: A Long Poem' (1977) portray themes from the Indian tradition. In 'The Man of Dharma and the Rasa of Silence', for instance, the poet borrows a known figure from the epic Mahābhārata, namely, Yudhisthira, and traces his progress "through the spectrum of the eight rasas till he arrives at the rasa of silence."

A.K. Ramanujam lives in the U.S.A., teaching Dravidian Linguistics at the University of Chicago. Even then his Indian experiences are very much alive in him and creep into his poetry easily. For instance, his poem 'Prayers to Lord Murugan' imitates the "Thirumurukarrupatal in which the Tamil poet Nakkirar sings in praise of Murugan, the Dravidian God of youth, beauty, love and war." The poet recaptures the spirit of this tradition where the bhakta or devotee blessed with Murugan's grace shows others the way to salvation. In his more famous poem, 'Relations : Poems' (1972) he reveals a persona entirely "bred in an ancestor's bone."

A fellow Tamil, R. Parthasarathy after his stay in England returned to India with a "new understanding of myself and

21 M.K. Naik, op. cit., p. 197. The concept of Rasa is at the heart of all Indian artistic expression. Rasa is literally, the taste, or relish of something. The rasa of a verse, song or dramatic performance is the taste or experience of the pervading emotion. *Intāta*, Chapter II, The Rasa School of Poetics.


His noted poem 'Rough Passage' recounts his Tamil past:

My tongue in English chains
I return, after a generation, to you
I am at the end
of my dravidic tether,
hunger for you unassuaged
I falter, stumble...  

Jayanta Mahapatra's poetry is redolent of the Orissa scene, and the Jagannatha temple at Puri figures quite often in it. For instance, here are a few lines from his poem 'The Faith':

What sentence of old
Moves him toward the furious wrinkled walls?
The Puri priest standing in indulgent sunshine
Plays a small ridicule across the melting festival
Safe in place above a pile of hard-eyed ancestors.

Clearly his roots are in the Oriyan tradition, though he has an ironic slant towards the growing hypocrisy around rituals and religious life. This approach to poetry is what is considered 'new' in the

24 R. Parthasarathy, Ten Twentieth Century Indian Poets (Delhi, 1976), p. 96.
25 cf: Ibid.
26 cf: Jayanta Mahapatra, Relationship (New York, 1980), p. 7: "The entire land literally spills with ancient temples and their ruins ... and Puri continues to be the hub of Orissa's cultural religious life; around the Great Temple of Jagannath... and the cry of a whole clan of people on my back."
27 Ibid., p. 10.
poetry of the 'new poets'. It is 'new' only in that it is different from the earlier Indian English Poetry. But regarding Indian poetry as a whole we can trace this particular approach to poetry back to the poetry written especially by Kshemendra\textsuperscript{28} of the eleventh century A.D. and his contemporaries. Again in several of the forty-four lyrics in the verse collection titled 'Waiting' (1979), Jayanta seems to recapitulate Vedic times and themes.\textsuperscript{29}

While carnage, especially in the wake of the partition of India, evoked memorable lines from Keki N. Daruwalla, of the eighteen poems in his collection, 'Crossing of Rivers' (1976), fourteen are on the river Ganga.\textsuperscript{30}

Most of Pritysh Nandy's poems are an experimentation in pyrotechnics, a poem interesting to look at but baffling to the understanding. For instance here is a piece from his poem, 'In Transit, Mind Seeks':

\begin{quote}
This world endures only because the wishes of these are unfulfilled; Debtors, undertakers, hangers-on, crooked politicians.
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{28}For instance, here are a few lines quoted from his poems in Sachchidananda Vatsyayan (ed.) \textit{The Indian Poetic Tradition} (Y.K. Publishers, Agra, 1983), p. 151.

\textsuperscript{29}cf: Iyenger, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 713.

\textsuperscript{30}cf: Iyenger, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 670. cf: World Literature Today, A Literary Quarterly, Autumn, 1987 (Univ. of Oklahoma), p. 675: "Keki Daruwalla's poems are often focussed on traditional North Indian Muslim life ... rather than revive a Parsee heritage."
use mathematics
to solve problems of position/location
and point in space
the calculus of
illogic love

: on
either side
of
arrogance

i draw the line.31

However, there are poems which are charged with passion and power, and reflect on Indian Myths and legends. For example, his poems, 'Calcutta' (1979), and 'Rites For a Plebian Statue' (1969) catch the mythological figures Ajatasatru and Priyadarsini in a contemporaneous mirror.32

The next important poet of this period is a woman, Kamala Das. In her poetry we may successfully trace the influence of the Nair heritage of Kerala as well as the strong influence of Bhakti Poetry sung around the Krishna legend in different languages in India.33

31Quoted in Iyenger, op. cit., p. 670. cf: Harry Blamires (ed.) A Guide to Twentieth Century Literature in English (Methuen, London, 1983), p. 195: "Nandy has described his poetic aim (as) to achieve an entirely new breakthrough in form, involving the fusion of a modern language with (Indian) myths and symbols."


33Int. H. pp. 49-67, for a detailed analysis of her poetical achievements.
This brief introduction to the general pattern of Indian English Poetry shows that to be Indian in nature is its predominant tendency. This 'Indianness' of Indian English Poetry is reflected in the writer's choice of subject matter, in the method, form and structure, in the type of imaginations, in the turn of expressions, and above all its aesthetic tones. Thus the Indianness of the subject matter may lie in the writer's decision to deal with Indian myth and legend as may be seen in the case of Toru Dutt, or in the Indian world view according to the Vedanta philosophy as in the poetry of Aurobindo or Tagore, or the poet may deal with the social movements animating the Indian people, as in the case of Kamala Das or Jayanta Mahapatra, or a poet may just deal with the pageantry and colour of Indian folk lore and the Indian landscape as in Sarojini Naidu. The structure, the emotions, the meaning, the imagination, and the aesthetic tone - all these are unconsciously generated by forces, goals and expectations that find expression in the poetics of the

34 cf: Iyenger, op. cit., p. 698: "What makes Indo-Anglian Literature an Indian Literature, and not just an overflow of English Literature, is the equality of Indianness - in the choice of subject, in the texture of thought and play of sentiment, in the organisation of material in terms of 'form' and in the creative use of language". cf: V.K. Gokak, The Concept of Indian Literature (Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, 1979), p. 76: "In short, the Indianness of Indian writing consists in the writer's intense awareness of his entire culture."

35 cf: Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics Alex Preminger (ed.) (Macmillain, 1974), p. 630: "Poetics is traditionally a systematic theory or doctrine of poetry. It defines poetry and its various branches and sub-divisions, forms and technical resources, and discusses the principles that govern it and that distinguishes it from other creative activities."
community to which the poet belongs. Hence in order to understand and appreciate Indian English Poetry, it becomes imperative for a reader or critic to be aware of the poetics that forms the aesthetic backdrop of the poet. And this poetics of the poet must be sought within Indian Poetics.

Indian Poetics records the brilliant evaluation of the concept of poetry from the time of Bharata (500 B.C.), the first known exponent on the theories of dramaturgy, to the time of Jagannātha (17th Cen. A.D.). The early theoreticians of Sanskrit, namely, Bhamaha (6th Cen. A.D.), Danqin (6th Cen. A.D.) and Vāmana (800 A.D.) defined "Poetry as Word and Sense in unison and endowed with beauty to produce delight." Bhāmaha discovered this beauty in

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36 *infra.*, Chapter II of the thesis.

37 In the Indian context, Indian Poetics means Sanskrit Poetics. cf: K. Kapoor and Ranga Kapoor, 'Third World Poetics: The Indian Case' Bulletin of Association of Commonwealth Literature and Language Studies, 7th Series, No.5 (Singapore, 1986), p. 48. cf: Sri Aurobindo, 'A Defence of Indian Literature' in Sujit Mukherjee (ed.) The Idea of an Indian Literature (CIIL, Mysore, 1981) p. 38: "Sanskrit ... is one of the most magnificent, the most perfect and wonderfully sufficient literary instruments developed by the human mind, at once majestic and sweet and flexible, strong and clearly-formed and full and vibrant and subtle, and its quality and character would be itself a sufficient evidence of the character and quality of the race whose mind it expressed and the culture of which it was the reflecting medium.

the strikingness or vakrokti of the figures of speech or alaṅkāras, while Vāmana discovered the animating principle of poetry in rīti, i.e. mode or style. Daṇḍin emphasised that it is owing to the presence of guṇas or qualities that rīti changed, and so established guṇa as the essential character of rīti. As these three theories of poetry were based on the structural-form of poetry, they were grouped under the Alaṅkāra (embellishment) School of Poetics. The Rasa School of Poetics first expounded by Bharata and later established by Abhinavagupta (10th Cen. A.D.) stressed the evocation of emotions as the primary essence of poetry. The Dhvani School of Poetics propounded by Ānandavardhana (9th Cen. A.D.) emphasised that the immanent value of poetry lay in its suggested meaning. Kuntaka who came in the tenth century A.D., unified the theories of Alaṅkāra, Rasa and Dhvani, and established Vakrokti or strikingness of speech as the locus of literariness in poetry and hence he held the poet responsible for creative poetry.

This brief summary of Indian Poetics reveals that systematic and sustained studies have been done over a long period of time in India, towards developing a vibrant theory of poetry. Moreover, Indian Poetics was born out of poetry itself. Hence Indian Poetry, from which it was born, is bound to reflect a concern for one or all of these theories, noted above. Consequently a critic aiming at the evaluation of Indian English Poetry should gain sufficient knowledge into the sources, nature and extent of Indian poetics. This will help him to identify and formulate a dynamic model that will enable him to evaluate the poetry written by Indians in English.
in an adequate perspective and raise the comprehension and criticism of Indian English Poetry to a higher level. This has become all the more necessary because under the pervasive influence of Western criticism, Indian English Poetry is also evaluated by the same standards. As a result, these critical studies failed to come to terms with the more elusive Indian ingredients in the interplay and therefore read the poems divorced from Indian contexts and judged them as purely English entities.

To begin with, critics of Indian English Poetry identified this poetry with British Poetry and then looked for British literary standards in it. For instance it was pointed out that Derozio derived his "poetic personality" and "romanticism of Man and Nature" from Byron and Wordsworth. Again it was said that Kashiprasad shared the influence of Walter Scott while Madhusudan Dutt "revealed the influence of the English romantics, especially Byron." It was said that the influence of Keats is strong in the poetry of

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39 cf: A.K. Warder, Indian Kavya Literature, Vol. One (Motilal Banarsi Das, Delhi, 1972), p. vii: "The scholars who tried to supply information on Indian Literature applied whatever critical ideas they had picked up from their environment accordingly taking Western models as the only possible standard of good literature." cf: Pandit Vishwanath Prasad, quoted in Nagendra (ed.) Literary Criticism in India (Meerut, 1970), p. 81: "Both creative literature and literary criticism have fallen under the baneful influence of foreign criticism."

40 H.M. Williams, op. cit., p. 16.

41 A.N. Dwivedi, op. cit., p. 17.

42 Iyenger, op. cit., p. 38.
Toru Dutt. Aurobindo's 'Savitri' is likened to the poetry of Milton while "the exotic flavour" of Tagore's 'Gitanjali' was "labelled as mysticism" due to the "vagueness of European knowledge of Indian religion." Thus while this early part of the Indian English poetry, from Derozio to Tagore, was identified as imitative of 'British Romantics', the latter part of the poetry was found imitative of "Eliot-Yeats and Auden". Criticism thus devoted itself to the task of tracing the sources and influences of Indian English Poetry exclusively in the English poetic tradition. In fact this tendency of looking at the early Indian English Poetry as imitative and derivative, because it is romantic reveals a shocking ignorance of the entire Indian literary tradition. The fact is that India is basically a land of poetry. The high mountains, and the foothills of the Himalayas in the North, the remarkable flow of oceans on the three sides of the country, beautiful landscapes, vast expanse of grassy land, rich treasures of golden crop round the country, deep woods, silvery streams and rivers and the varied patterns of flora and fauna in all parts of this vast subcontinent had inspired generations of Indian poets and writers. Poets like Vālmīki (5th Cent. A.D.), Vyāsa (3rd Cent. B.C.), Kālidāsa (1st Cent. B.C. - 4th Cent. A.D.),

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43 Ibid., p. 73.
44 H.M. Williams, op. cit., p. 27.
Bhāvabhūti (7th Cen. A.D.), Dandin (6th Cen. A.D.), Kamban (17th Cen. A.D.), Vallathol (19th Cen. A.D.) and many others who had composed in the classical languages like Pali, Prakrit, Sanskrit, Tamil and so on have left their "flowering treasures of letters for the posterity." Thus the Indian literary tradition right from its beginning has always been predominantly 'romantic'. Further the 16th century Persian influence which came in the wake of Muslim conquest of India was also romantic in character. All these influences have maintained an unmistakable continuity and permanence in the total cultural ethos of India, in spite of the strong Western impact from the eighteenth century onwards. In fact, this Western impact actually vitalised the indigenous tradition which had already been established firmly over the centuries.

In spite of the factual presence of a native literary tradition, which was capable enough to nourish and foster the imagination of poets, critics of Indian English Poetry relied for its resources of insight into the English Language and Literature. The critics failed to see that Indian English Poetry is neither a part nor an extension of British Poetry and that this poetry "with its roots in the soil

47 Anil Baran Ganguly, 'Introduction', Indian Poetry in English, An Anthology (Atma Ram and Sons, Delhi, 1984.)

48 cf: Sri Aurobindo, The Renaissance in India (Pondicherry, 1972), p. 397: The British impact brought in a literary Renaissance. This Renaissance was "the attempt of a re-awakened national spirit to find new impulse of self-expression which shall give the spiritual force for a great reshaping and rebuilding."
and soul of India" is not just another "variation or devaluation of English Literature."

As a result of this prejudiced view, critics came up with contradictory and distorted evaluations of Indian English Poetry. An instance in point is M.K. Naik's evaluation of Kashiprasad Ghose's poem, 'A Boatman's Song to Ganga'. In this poem the critic found the river Ganga "practically indistinguishable from the standardised 'soft-flowing stream' in any piece of conventional nature description," because "it is certainly not the Great Ganga as the Indians knew her." On the other hand the critic found the river in A. K. Ramanujan's poem 'Madurai River' "very much authentic" because "it is a river which carried off three village houses/one pregnant woman/and a couple of cows/named Gopi and Brinda." Here instead of explaining why the critic objected to the poet's reference to the "Great Ganga" - that "Nehru called 'the river of India'" as the "gold river" with "bright breast", in an astonishing misevaluation he compares the poem with the poem of A.K. Ramanujan,

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49 Journal of Indian Literature (Sahitya Akademi, New Delhi), May-June, 1986, p. 139


51 Ibid., p. 34.

52 cf: Jawaharlal Nehru, The Discovery of India (Oxford Univ. Press, 1982), p. 48: "The story of Ganges ... is the story of India's civilization and culture, ... of the adventure of man and the quest of mind which has so occupied India's thinkers, of the richness and fulfilment of life as well as its denial and renunciation, of ups and downs, of growth and decay, of life and death."
whose poetry belongs to another period in Indian Poetry, and concludes that Ghose's is an example of "imitation" by "using local colour, purely as an external device."

Let us briefly study the poem under discussion, applying Indian critical standards. The stanza is as follows:

Gold river! Gold river! how gallantly
Our bark on thy bright-breast is now lifting her prow
In the pride of her beauty how swiftly she flies
Like white-winged spirit across topas-paved skies.

By applying Indian critical standard of 9th century A.D., we may describe this kind of poetry as guṇībhūta-vyāhgya kāvya, or the poetry in which the suggested meaning lies subordinate to the expressed meaning. Here prominence is given to the strikingness of expression. Decorativeness has always been an important value in Indian poetry. In a land where Nature provides an astonishing variety of climate, scene and setting, ornamentation has always been an important value in the popular mind, "so that even the practitioner of useful art was supposed to display his aesthetic sense in his

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53 Supra., p. 8.
54 M.K. Naik, in H.M. Prasad, op. cit., p. 33.
creation". In this case Kashiprasad Ghose is in fact a beginner in Indian English poetry-writing. His attempts to adorn his poem by drawing images from Nature - the great source - is therefore, in keeping with the Indian tradition of poetry-writing. Here by employing the figure of speech atisayokti or exaggeration, the poet imposes on the image of 'river Ganga' the image of a beautiful lady "of Gold colour" with "bright-breast", "in the pride of her beauty". This description is capable of evoking the experience of adbhuta or marvellousness. Further the image of the "bark... lifting her prow... on... thy breast" suggests the experience of śṛṅgāra rasa. The accommodation of the friendly rasas, adbhuta and śṛṅgāra is again in keeping with Indian Poetics. The comparison of the river's flight with "white-winged spirit" across "the topaz-
paved skies" brings to the mind of one familiar with Indian mythology, the image of the flight of Ganga from Heaven to Earth. The route which Ganga takes is referred to as the milky way. So here, "the white-winged spirit" across the river stands for the milky-way. M.K. Naik failed to note the suggestion.

The strikingness of the whole expression leads it to the quality (guṇa) of sweetness (Mādhurya), which brings delight (Āhlāda) to the mind and makes it melt (drutī karāṇa). The Kaiśiki vṛtti is indicative of the Sukumāra rāti or delicate style. This style is also known by the regional name vaidarbhi or southern, indicating its place of origin. In fact Indian Poetics allows that "the mādhurya guṇa, Kaiśiki vṛtti and vaidarbhi rāti will go together as characteristics of a set of poetic conditions."  

Sanskrit Poetics also maintains that "for an adequate expression of the poet's vision and attitude, truthfulness to life has to be maintained in the construction of the plot," and its delineation. So if the poet goes for a completely imaginary theme which has

60 cf: Sister Nivedita and A.K. Coomaraswamy, Myth of Hindus and Buddhists (George Harrap, 1918).


62 cf: V. Raghavan. Some Concepts of Alahkāra Śāstra (The Adyar Library Series, 1942), p. 182: "Kaiśiki Vṛtti... indicates the kind of diction excelling in descriptions of love, evening, moonlight, seasons etc.”

63 Ibid., p. 182.

no roots in tradition, the communicability of the vision suffers considerably. Here the poet Kashiprasad, chooses Ganga from tradition, "The Ganga flowing from the Himalayas to the bosom of the sea at Ganga Sagar (in the Bay of Bengal) became part and parcel of Hindu life. She aroused the emotions and touched the imaginations of poets." So the poet can choose such a topic and be sure that his theme will bring a response from both the conscious and unconscious mind of his reader, just as the poet Kashiprasad has done here.

Hence we notice that in all aspects an evaluation of Kashiprasad Ghose's poem using Indian critical standard reveals vividly the potentialities contained in the poem. Nowhere in the poem does it look imitative or derivative of the Western Romantic Poetry as the critic M.K. Naik would put it.

Another instance of the pervasive Western influence on criticism of Indian English Poetry relates to Sri Aurobindo's poem 'Savitri'. The poem 'Savitri' is a "deeply philosophical Hindu epic." But unlike the conventional epic form, it has very little natural descriptions in it. The diction and imagery reflect the modern scientific world. It is not action-packed and most of what happens in it takes place at the suggestive level or at the level of dhvani. But critics of this poem were insensitive to the suggestive content of the poem.

Thus P. Lal, poet and critic, condemned the poem as "weak-spined and purple adjectived."\textsuperscript{68} Another critic Adil Jussawalla (1940-) found "Savitri... one vast onion of a poem... unwinding like an interminable sari."\textsuperscript{69} The more famous poet and critic Keki N. Daruwalla concluded that "no other Indian poet was half as bad, none so nebulous or verbose, or who so thoroughly confused the inflated with the sublime."\textsuperscript{70} Obviously these critics were put off by the long narrative form of the poem. According to them "an exacting loyalty of words to idea, images and impulse" can be maintained only if "expressed in a compact, simple and lucid style shorn of ornaments."\textsuperscript{71} In short they believe that only a poem written in this mode of expression qualifies as authentic poetry.\textsuperscript{72} It will be interesting to note in this connection that the Sanskrit theoreticians of the 9th century A.D.

\textsuperscript{68} P. Lal, Modern Indian Poetry in English (Calcutta, 1969) p. vii.

\textsuperscript{69} Quoted in William Walsh, Readings in Commonwealth Literature (Oxford Univ. Press, 1973), p. 76.

\textsuperscript{70} Keki N. Daruwalla, Two Decades of Indian Poetry (New Delhi, 1981), p. xv.

\textsuperscript{71} A.N. Dwivedi, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 37.

\textsuperscript{72} cf: Pritish Nandy (ed.), Modern Indian Poetry (New Delhi, 1974), p. 18. Underlying this response is the influence of a typical Western movement in Literature. The protagonists of this movement, viz., the Symbolists, believed that the evocativeness and suggestiveness in poetry could best be obtained by verse-form that were not too rigid. They preferred the use of a concrete image to express an emotion or an abstract idea, so that it was noted that "a symbol is a kind of comparison between the abstract and the concrete in which one of the terms of comparison is only suggested. Thus it is implicit, not spelt out". - cf: J.A. Cuddon, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 672.
considered the dhvani kāvya or suggestive poetry as "true poetry." However critics of Indian English Poetry ignorant of this fact hold the Western Symbolic Movement as original, new and modern. Hence the insensitiveness to Sri Aurobindo's symbolic epic 'Savitri'.

Nevertheless some attempts have been made to study Indian English Poetry from an Indian point of view, and most critics happen to 'comment' on the 'Indianness' of this poetry. But these are more in the nature of incidental references merely touching upon the Indian setting or subject matter and find that "Indian Poetry in English is only occasionally poetry and only sometimes Indian having been made as England." So the criticism took note of "Indian motifs, responses, attitudes and trends, like the images of rain, peacock and lotus, and attitudes like renunciation, resignation and non-attachment." For instance here is a specimen from M.K. Naik's criticism of Indian English Poetry:

The Indian poet's Indianness may find expression through his imagery. The recurrent feudal imagery in Tagore (King, Prince, begger, chariot) establishes links with the medieval Saint poets, the variegated colours in Sarojini Naidu's poetry (The sky burns like a pidgeon's throat; the white river is curved like a tusk) stamp it as truly of the soil.

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74 cf: M.K. Naik, 'Indianness of Indian Poetry in English' in H.M. Prasad, op. cit., p. 30.
75 Ibid.
76 Iyenger, op. cit., p. 650.
77 cf: H.M. Prasad, op.cit., p. 34.
The review clearly is founded on an inadequate awareness of the native poetic technique or the art of poetry and is notable only for some "bright-glittering vowels."\textsuperscript{78}

Thus we notice that criticism of Indian English Poetry, in general, showed a lack of awareness on the part of the critics, of the need to think about suitable standards of judgement.

However, there are critics who dismiss the proposal to revive Indian Poetics as "fake patriotism"\textsuperscript{79} and "chauvinism."\textsuperscript{80} They assert that on the contrary one should be "conversant with the Western standards of criticism and aesthetic doctrines and use his knowledge of them to fertilize his own tradition."\textsuperscript{81} These critics, however, failed to see that Western poets whom they take as authentic critics, for instance, Coleridge and T.S. Eliot, were in fact much conversant with the Indian critical tradition of three thousand years. The critical

\textsuperscript{78} Bruce King, Modern Indian Poetry in English (Oxford Univ. Press, 1987), p. 74.


\textsuperscript{80} C. Paul Verghese, Essays on Indian Writing in English (New Delhi, 1975), p. 115.

\textsuperscript{81} Ibid., In this connection it is worthwhile to take note of what Conrad Aiken says of Western criticism in his book, Collected Criticism (Oxford Univ. Press, 1968), p. 55: "What Literature of criticism we have in English - and it is slight, for the Anglo-Saxon is not by nature a good critic - is littered with sham jewels of sort, which have a pleasant gleam, but give little light. And this deplorable vagueness, this almost total lack of any system or scale of values ..."
works of these poets, Coleridge and T.S. Eliot, are studied and imbibed with unfailing faith by every scholar of literature. Yet they failed to notice that Coleridge's knowledge of the Orient was more profound than it has been generally realised. Similarly it may be interesting to note that T.S. Eliot had spent "two years in the study of Sanskrit and a year in the maize of Patanjali's metaphysics, (which) left (him) in a state of enlightened mystification." At the end of this experience T.S. Eliot conceded that "the Indian philosophers... make most of the great European philosophers look like school boys" and that his only hope "of really penetrating the heart of that mystery would lie in forgetting how to think and feel as an American or European."

In fact, a thorough analysis of Indian Poetics will reveal that most of the theories that are being discussed in the Western critical tradition were already broached with great perception and


83 Ibid.
detail in the Indian tradition of poetics, logic and philosophy a long time ago. As such it is particularly unfortunate that critics of Indian English Poetry followed the British masters and disparaged the native traditions (with which they were in any case not familiar) with the implicit assumption that this attitude per se amounted to a modern objective broad-mindedness. Criticism thus devoted itself to the task of tracing the sources and influence of Indian English Poetry exclusively in the English poetical tradition. Thus the poetry of the three poetesses - Toru Dutt, Sarojini Naidu and Kamala Das - selected here for study was also judged by the same standards. We shall trace these critical analysis of their poetry along with a survey of the poetical achievements of these three poetesses, in the following paragraphs.

**Toru Dutt** (1856-1877) born in Calcutta, in a Bengali-Hindu family, was converted to Christianity along with the family, when she was six years old. Thereafter she spent some of her early formative years in England and France, during which time she acquired proficiency in the French and English languages. Toru Dutt along with her sister Aru Dutt (1854-1874) made many English translations

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84 cf: Dr. Bhayani, quoted in 'Is there a climate of criticism in our literature', *Journal of Indian Literature*, May-June (New Delhi, 1983) p. 87: "Numerous views of R. Jacobson, J. Culler, R. Sholes, M. Riffaterre, of Russian formalists and of the sponsors of stylistics, structuralism, semiotics and Hermeneutics can be looked upon as almost restatements of what was said very earlier by Bhamaha, Vamana, Anandavardhana, Kuntaka, Abhinavagupta, Jagannatha and others."

from French. This exercise eventually led to the publication of her first collection of poems, titled 'A Sheaf Gleaned in French Fields', in the year 1875. The volume, containing about one hundred and sixty-six poems, of which eight were by Aru, was widely appreciated. In England, the critic Edmund Gosse wrote that "if modern French literature were entirely lost, it might not be found impossible to reconstruct a great number of poems from this Indian version," and in India the critic Harihar Das noted that "it is difficult to realise that the book is not the work of an English writer", and added that "Toru's command of English is wonderful."\[86\]

The collection of poems, 'A Sheaf Gleaned in French Fields' is generally evaluated and put aside as an excellent enterprise in translation. It was admitted that Toru ably handled the exercise and "successfully showed that the translator is also the creator."\[87\] Another critic, Dasgupta, observed that "it was Toru, the first of major Indian writers who proved that the translation is not an isolated phenomenon but an index of personality, meaningful in its relatedness with greater heritage, cultural and literary. She gives a status to translation."\[88\]

However, it was when the Dutt family returned to India, and Toru took up the study of Sanskrit, that she found her true creative impulse. She read with great interest the Rāmāyaṇa, the Mahābhārata, the Viṣṇu Purāṇa, the Bhāgavata and the Sakuntala.\[89\] Soon

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\[86\] Ibid., pp. 31-40.
\[88\] Quoted in Dwivedi, op. cit.
she wrote poems in English, inspired by the stories of illustrious brave men and women depicted in these Hindu myths and legends. These poems were collected under the title 'Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan' and was published posthumously in 1882. Apart from seven personal poems in the second part, this volume has nine poems on the legends of Hindustan. They are titled as 'Savitri', 'Lakshman', 'Jogadhyama', 'The Royal Ascetic and the Hind', 'Dhruva', 'Buttoo', 'Sindhu', 'Prahlad' and 'Sita'.

The first long poem titled 'Savitri' is based on the story of Princess Savitri, depicted in the Mahābhārata. It describes the courageous persistence of Savitri with the God of Death, Yama, to restore her husband's life. Note for instance a few lines spoken by Savitri to Yama:

No weariness, 0 Death, I feel,
    And how should I, when by the side
Of Satyavan? In woe and weal
    To be a helpmate swears the bride.
This my place: by solemn oath
    Wherever thou conductest him
I too must go, to keep my troth:
    And if the eye at times should brim,
Tis human weakness, give me strength
    My work appointed to fulfil,
That I may gain the crown at length
    The Gods give those who do their will.\(^{90}\)

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\(^{90}\) Toru Dutt, Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan (A Writers Workshop Series, 1972), p. 21. Further references from this book will be noted in the parenthesis by the page number.
Savitri's pure love and deep sense of faith finally overcomes all obstacles and she wins back her husband from the hands of Death. The poem seeks to highlight the Hindu concept of Duty, or what may be referred to as the wife's 'Dharma'.91

The poem 'Lakshman' depicts a scene from the Ramayana. Here Rama's wife Sita in an agony of fear that her husband may have been overcome by a demon, asks Lakshman to go to Rama's rescue. But Lakshman, in whose safe custody Sita has been entrusted, is not at all inclined to disregard Rama's order. Sita reprimands Lakshman for his inaction and attributes his reluctance to a base motive. But Lakshman, most loyal of brothers, overcome by the sense of unflinching duty retorts in this way:

For here beside thee, as a guard
Twas he commanded me to stay
And dangers with life to ward
If they should come across thy way.

(p.30)

The poem 'Jogadhya Uma' takes its theme from Indian folklore. It depicts a bangle-seller tramping along the road in the early hours of the morning calling out:

"Shell-bracelets ho! Shell-bracelets ho!
Fair maids and matrons come and buy!"

It was so early that there were few to hear his cry. Soon the pedlar comes to a lonely spot where lay a "lake-like tank" shadowed by

fruit trees. On one side, a wide flight of marble steps ran from an arched entrance to the water's edge. Here facing the morning light sat a beautiful maiden with "large eyes/And dark hair falling to her zone". The pedlar stopped to display his bracelets to the fair maiden. As the maiden stretched out her hand, the pedlar slipped the bracelet on the "fairer hand". As the pedlar stood "dazzled" by her beauty, she bade him seek payment at her home. He asked where that was. She said that her father, who would pay for the bracelet, was an old priest and lived in the temple, whose "lofty gilded spire" appeared in the distance. Following the directions, the pedlar reached the Temple and after accepting the hospitality of the old priest told of his errand. But the priest retorted that "no daughter in the world have I/An only son is all my stay". But when the priest found in accordance to the pedlar's direction in the "small-box, marked with streaks/of bright vermilion", the exact sum needed to pay for the bracelet, the priest realised in a flash that the vision of the Goddess which he had so long sought for had come suddenly to the simple pedlar.

Both the priest and the pedlar hastily set out for the tank. But they did not find anybody there. As they turned sadly away, the chime of the Temple bells rang out, and the priest once more turning towards the tank pleaded for some sign of her presence. Then, there was a sudden stir among the lotus buds covering the surface of water and a beautiful round arm wearing the white bracelet appeared for a moment. The pedlar and priest "bowed before the mystic power".

And as they home returned in thought

Each took from thence a lotus flower
In memory of the day and spot
Years, centuries, have passed away,
And still before the temple shrine
Descendants of the pedlar pay
Shell-bracelets of the old design
An annual tribute...
The poetess then ends the tale by proferring hints about the source
of the poem thus:
Absurd may be the tale I tell,
Ill-suited to the marching times,
I loved the lips from which it fell,
So let it stand among my rhymes.

(p. 41)
The poem 'The Royal Ascetic and the Hind' describes "the
matchless asceticism of King Bharat of Saligram".92 The story is
taken from the Viṣṇu Purāṇa and "retains the dialogue of the original."93

The poem 'The Legend of Dhruva' is taken from Viṣṇu Purāṇa, Book
I Chapter XI94 and recounts the story of prince Dhruva, who relinqu­
ished the position of worldly power for the sake of spiritual great­
ness. The Hindu doctrine of 'Karma'95 is highlighted here. Dhruva

92 cf: A.N. Dwivedi, Toru Dutt, op.cit., p. 100.
93 Ibid.
94 cf: Toru Dutt, op.cit., p. 46.
95 cf: Benjamin Walker, op.cit., p. 529: "Karma - the principle
of universal causality resulting from action... It is based
on the premise that the whole world order rests on rigid
principles dominated by the immutable law of cause and
effect... There is no random combination of events, no acci­
dental or for-tuitous occurrence, since causality underlies
all" - Hence here Dhruva humbly accepted his fate.
while leaving his princely state says to his mother thus:

... Not with another's gifts
Desire I, dearest mother, to be rich
But with my own work would acquire a name.

(p.49)

The poem 'Buttoo' highlights the nature of an ideal discipline.
The story is taken from the Mahābhārata. Buttoo being born in a
low caste family is rejected by the great Dronacharya as a pupil
in archery. However, Buttoo achieves perfection in archery "by learn-
ing all with the image of the Master before him."96 When the Master
comes to know of it and reprimands him, Buttoo offers his thumb
without any hesitation as teacher's fee. Dronacharya is deeply moved
by the pupil's sense of loyalty and wishes him immortality. What
is significant here is that Buttoo, though rejected by Dronacharya
considers him his 'Guru', to the extent of carrying out his behest
to chop off his right thumb that would destroy the very edifice of
his own life.

"Thou art my master ask! Oh ask.
From thee my inspiration came
Thou canst not set too hard a task
Nor aught refuse I, free from blame".

(P.57)

In the poem 'Sindhu', Toru Dutt depicts the story of an ideal
son. The story is taken from the Rāmāyana. King Dasaratha of
Ayodhya, while hunting in the forest, kills accidently Sindhu, the
only son and prop of an aged couple. Before he dies, Sindhu expresses

96Iyenger, op. cit., p. 65.
in the "noblest sentiments that can ever fall from the lips of a dutyful son" thus:

And so I die - a bloody death -
But not for this I mourn,
To feel the world pass with my breath
I gladly could have borne,
But for my parents, who are blind,
And have no other stay -
This, this weighs sore upon my mind,
And fills me with dismay.

What is striking here is that Sindhu's thoughts as he is dying are not of his own fate but of his duty to his parents.

The poem 'Prahlad' takes its theme from the Viṣṇu Purāṇa. The story depicts the boy Prahlad, who is a firm believer in God. But his father the king, who does not believe in God and considers himself as the final authority, ill-treats the boy for his belief. The father challenges the son to produce God in the pillar in the court room. The father then spurns the pillar with his foot. From within the pillar appears Narasimha, the half-man, half-lion, God. The God then tears the King to pieces and hails Prahlad. What is highlighted here is that Prahlad does not ignore his filial duty, but only affirms his devotion to the so called "higher duty":

To thee, and to my mother, both
I give as due all reverence
And to obey thee am not loth.

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97 K.A. Agrawal, The Poetic Achievements of Toru Dutt (Kitab Mahal, Delhi, 1982), p. 118.
But higher duties sometimes clash
With lower, - then these last must go
(p. 75)

The poem 'Sita' depicts the wife of Rama, of the Ramayana. Here Toru Dutt, presents Sita as the picture of an ideal woman. The story of Sita, is reminisced as told to her, by her mother:

It is an old, old story, and the lay
which has evoked sad Sita from the past
Is by a mother sung... (p. 81).

"The tenderness and purity and the untold sufferings of women took shape as the Uttara Ramayana. Like an unflickering lamp it throws light on the quality of their hearts." Toru's poem is also an 'Unflickering lamp' which throws light on the quality of her heart.

The other nine shorter poems put together at the close of 'Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan' are not based on any legends or myths, but are very personal poems. Thus in her poem 'Our Casurina Tree', the poetess combines her love of nature with tender evocation of childhood:

Dear is the Casurina, to my soul;
Beneath it we have played, though years may roll,
O, Sweet companions, loved with love intense,
For your sakes shall the tree be ever dear!  99

The poem 'The Tree of Life' describes poignantly how an Angel, his face lit up with pity and divine love, once stood by the

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98 Rajaji, quoted in Iyenger, op. cit., p. 71
99 cf: K.A. Agrawal, op. cit., p. 115. Further references of her poems, in the parenthesis, are from this book.
side of a 'tree with spreading branches' and crowned her head with "a few small sprigs."100

The poem 'The Lotus' depicts a quaint story of the birth of the flower, Lotus. Thus one day,
Love came to Flora asking for a flower
That would of flowers be undisputed queen
After some moments of hesitation to select between rose and lily,
Flora gave the lotus, 'rose-red' dyed,
And 'lily-white, queenliest flower that blows!

In the poem 'Baugmaree' the poetess speaks of the scenic beauty of the garden of their country house at Baugmaree in Calcutta:
A sea of foliage girds our garden round...
The light-green graceful tamarinds bound
Amid the mango clouds of green profound,
And palms arise, like pillars grey, between,
And o'er the quiet pools the seemuls lean,
Red; - red and startling like a trumpet's sound. (p. 129)

These four poems, in general, display the poetess's ardent love for Nature, and her ability to conceive of them creatively and imaginatively.

Three other poems, namely, 'Near Hastings' records an incident in Toru's life in England; 'France-1870' shows Toru's love and admiration for France; and 'On the Fly-leaf of Erckmann Chatrian's Novel Entitled Madame Therese' records the impression made upon Toru by an incident narrated in the novel.

100 cf: Iyenger, op.cit., p. 70.
It is generally believed that for the development and growth of poetic art and vision, constant and hard practice is required over a considerable period of time. Toru Dutt's poetic career spans only a short period of about seven to eight years. In this short period that she lived, Toru Dutt left behind only two volumes of poetry. Thus at the numeral level Toru's output looks slim, and for this reason not much critical attention is focussed on her poetry. Hence her poetry is generally treated as a brave effort "by a sick girl who had known pain and been shadowed by a sense of fatality," and "portraying moral beauty and sweetness... expressly arranged to tantalize the sympathetic reader."102

Moreover, the critics of Toru Dutt ranked her poetry with the British Romantic Poetry. Hence the simplicity of her verse and some of her motifs reminded her critics of Keats and Shelley, especially "the champak and the lotus and the Kokila."103 The critic further found "the zeal and gusto of a Sir Walter Scott" in the poem 'Prahlad' and yet he would maintain that Prahlad taken from the Mahābhārata enunciated "the Hindu doctrine of Karma nicely."104

Another critic found Toru's description of the seemul's red flowers in her poem 'Baugmaree' as "Red-red, and startling like a

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101 cf: C.D. Narasimhaiah, The Swan and the Eagle, op. cit., p. 25: "The critic's ineptitude or ignorance of her work or his prejudice against the work of a mere girl and a colonial to boot may have operated in Toru Dutt not getting praise."


103 A.N. Dwivedi, Toru Dutt, op. cit., p. 83.

104 Ibid., p. 145.
trumpet's sound," as "an image surprisingly modern in its use of synaesthesia, a device used so effectively by Edith Sitwell."\textsuperscript{105}

This identification of Toru Dutt's poetry with the British Romantic poets has in fact done much damage to her. Anyone wishing to study her poetry is immediately put off when critics almost unanimously decry it as imitative and derivative.

\textbf{Sarojini Naidu} (1879-1949), the second poetess chosen here for study, born to Bengali parents, grew up entirely in the cultural milieu of Hyderabad.\textsuperscript{106} Like Toru Dutt, she spent some of her early formative years in England. Her stay in England enabled her to achieve proficiency in the use of the English language for creative expression. But, unlike Toru Dutt, it was after she returned to India and settled down in Hyderabad after marriage, that her poetic career grew and attained perfection.

Although Sarojini Naidu lived a full life of seventy years, her active poetic career spans only a brief period of two decades, from 1898-1914. Her poetic output began with the publication of her first book of verse, 'The Golden Threshold' in 1905. The second volume of poems called 'The Bird of Time', was published in 1912. The third collection of poems was published in 1917 under the title 'The Broken Wing'. The fourth and final book of poems 'The Feather of Dawn' was published posthumously in 1961.

Sarojini Naidu's collected poems 'The Sceptred Flute' appeared in 1946. Published by Kitabistan, from Allahabad, it contains in all

\textsuperscript{105} M.K. Naik, \textit{A History of Indian English Literature}, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 40.
one hundred and twenty-six poems. All of them are mostly short poems, which may be termed as lyrics. The poems are entirely set within the Indian background. The themes are drawn from Indian folklore, myth and natural scenery. The first group of poems collected under the sub-title 'Folk Songs' capture in verse the life of groups of Indian folks engaged in their traditional vocations. For instance in the poem 'Indian Weavers', the Indian weavers are seen singing while engaged in weaving. They sing that "at break of day" they "weave the robes of a new-born child", "at fall of night", "the marriage-veils of a queen" and "in the moonlight-chill" they weave "a dead man's funeral shroud."107

Similarly, in the poem 'Palanquin-Bearers', we find bearers engaged in their occupation of bearing the new-bride to the bridegroom's house. Even today, especially in Eastern India, in most marriages the ceremony of palanquin marks the initiation of the bride into married life. The palanquin-bearers are "gentle, chivalrous in their deference and courteous in their attention to the feelings of the bride, who leaves the familiar parental home to join her new home."108 The palanquin-bearers, conscious of the new bride's mental status must therefore bear her lightly and softly along. This journey of the palanquin-bearers with the new bride is captured beautifully and most sensitively by the poetess, and the "visual fluidity of form is delicately woven into the texture, rhythm and tone"109 of the poem. Witness a few

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109 Ibid.
Lightly, O lightly, we bear her along
She sways like a flower in the wind of our song;
...
Softly, O softly, we bear her along
She hangs like a star in the dew of our song.

The other poems, namely, 'The Snake-Charmer', 'Corngrinders', 'Indian Dancers', 'Wandering-Singers', 'Bangle-sellers', all portray the Indian folk life. In the simple, traditional life and work of these people, Sarojini Naidu sees "the unbroken flow of Indian life through the centuries."

Some of the poems are based on Indian festivals. For instance the poem 'Vasant Panchami' celebrates the arrival of spring thus:

O quench your flame, ye crimson gulmohors
That flaunt your dazzling bloom across my doors,
Furl your white bells, sweet champa buds that call
Wild bees to your ambrosial festival (p. 90)

The poem 'Festival of Serpents' describes the festive rituals performed on the occasion of Naga-Panchami, when Indian women invoke the serpent-deities to confer on them the blessing of fertility, fulfilment and chastity.

In the poem 'The Festival of the Sea' the poetess depicts the festival of fisher-folk, in which the fishermen conceive the sea as the "Bountiful Mother", who provides them with everything. It is "a festival of the people of Western India who live by the sea and prosper by it."
Sarojini Naidu is basically a poet of Nature, especially of the spring season. The numerous poems collected under the sub-title, 'Songs of Springtime', 'The Peacock Lure' describe spring in all its hue and splendour. "Drunk with the rich, red honey of spring" (p. 88) the poetess sang in praise of henna.

But for lily-like fingers and feet
The red, the red of the henna tree-. (p. 13)

The poetess again sang in praise of gulmohur blossoms, lotus, and champak which have,
Amber petals, ivory petals,
Petals of carven jade,
Charming with your ambrosial sweetness
Forest and field and glade (p. 97)

The poetess then sang of harvest-sights, warbling birds and also of night fall in her city of Hyderabad thus:

See how the speckled sky burns like a pigeon's throat
Jewelled with embers of opal and peridot. (p. 55)

Sarojini Naidu is also a poetess of love. She traces the progress of Love in the long poem 'The Temple' from the section 'The Gate of Delight' through the 'The Path of Tears' and ultimately ends in 'The Sanctuary', where it culminates in mystical self-surrender. "These three sub-titles allude to the three parts of the temple according to classical Hindu architecture: the torana (entrance way), the pradakshina patha (circumbulatory path-way) and the garbhagriha (inner sanctuary)."113

113 V.S. Naravone, op.cit., p. 34.
When Sarojini Naidu sings of spring-time and love, she is also conscious of the looming death. For instance, the group of poems under the sub-titles 'Songs of Life and Death' and 'Songs of Love and Death' are a testimony of her pre-occupation with the theme of death. But like the Indian philosopher death is for her only a condition in life, which helps her to understand the meaning of 'Love' and 'Life', and that

Life is a prison of My light
And Death the shadow of My face. (p. 123)

Sarojini Naidu's familiarity with Indian myths is evident in her poems, for instance, 'The Flute Player of Brindavan' and 'Song of Radha, the Milkmaid'. These poems built around the Radha-Krishna mythology, reveal "a continuation of the Sringarik-tradition". 114

Sarojini Naidu, was highly aware of the problems of women, and their condition in life. For instance, the unshakable love of Indian women for their husbands is reflected in the poem 'Suttee' (p.18). 115 It is a love which is so strong that death was regarded as a lesser calamity than separation. Sarojini's poem depicts the condition of a

114 H.M. Prasad, (ed.) Indian Poetry in English (Aurangabad, 1983), p. 20. It may be noted that Sanskrit words occurring within quotations do not necessarily follow the Sanskrit pronunciation-scheme, as the authors do not follow them. Hence these words are maintained as in the original.

115 Cf: Naravone, op.cit., p. 102. fn: "The word 'sati' simply means 'a virtuous woman' or 'a faithful wife'. (Apte's Sanskrit Dictionary gives the meaning-'A virtuous or good woman or wife'. Macdonell: 'Good, virtuous or faithful wife'. Ananda K. Coomaraswamy has pointed out that Western writers have completely distorted the meaning of sati. They render it as 'widow burning')."
woman whose husband is dead. In the first stanza the woman describes her departed husband as the 'lamp' of her life extinguished by Death's cold breath and she cries out

"Love must I dwell in the living dark?"

In the second stanza she refers to her husband as the "tree of my life" which was crushed underneath "Death's cruel foot" and she cries out

"Shall the blossom live when the tree is dead?"

In the third stanza she refers to her husband as "Life of my life" which was severed by Death's bitter sword" and she cries out,

"Shall the flesh survive when the soul is gone?"

The poem thus depicts the hollow and pitious condition of a wife who has lost her husband.

Again in the poem, 'The Pardah Nashin', which has been criticised as an attempt to glorify the chained condition of women, the poetess depicts a world of courtesy, charm and contentment enjoyed by the women. Her life is "a revolving dream/of languid and sequestered ease." Secure in all their luxury and surrounded by beautiful and precious things, dressed in colourful raiment, soft like the morning mist, the lovely ladies are immersed in perpetual relaxation:

Her days are guarded and secure
Behind her carven lattices,
Like jewels in a turbaned crest,
Like secrets in a lover's breast.

However, the poetess is conscious of a chained mind within this "sequestered ease":

But though no hand unsanctioned dares
unveil the mysteries of her grace.

116 cf: Naravone, op. cit., p. 100.
Time lifts the curtain unawares,
And sorrow looks into her face...
Who shall prevent the subtle years,
Or shield a woman's eyes from tears.

A significant aspect of Sarojini Naidu's poetry is her deep understanding of the Islamic tradition in India. Hyderabad, the city in which she was born and grew up was not only ruled by a Muslim dynasty at that time, but had retained for many centuries a way of life created by Muslims and Hindus together. This acquaintance of the poetess with the rich culture of the city comes alive in many of her poems. For instance the poems, 'Nighfall in the City of Hyderabad', 'Ode to H.H. The Nizam of Hyderabad', and 'The Royal Tombs of Golconda'. Her familiarity with the Islamic Tradition is evidenced in the poems such as 'The Baazars of Hyderabad', 'Humayun to Zobeida', 'The Song of Princess Zeb-Un-Nissa in Praise of Her Own Beauty', 'The Pardah Nashin', 'A Persian Love-Song', 'Leili', 'The Old Woman', 'The Wandering Beggar' and so on. In the poem 'The Prayer of Islam' for instance, Allah is addressed by ten different names (p.168). This poem written on the day of Id-uz-Zoha, shows Sarojini's deep feeling not only for Islamic culture but also for the purely religious aspect of Islam. Note for instance the deep feeling with which the poetess opens the poem:

We praise Thee, O Compassionate!
Master of Life and Time and Fate,
Lord of the labouring winds and seas,
Ya Hameed! Ya Hafeez!

Sarojini Naidu's understanding of the Islamic element in Indian culture

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117 cf: *ibid.*, p.82.
was partly due to her fondness for Urdu, and Persian literature. She spoke Urdu fluently and enjoyed listening to MUSHAIRAS-symphonies of poets.

Sarojini Naidu, thus in the main, is a poetess of 'beauty'. What appealed to her were the colourful and picturesque scenes of Indian life. Hence what strikes one most in her poetry is its "strikingness of expression". Yet, it is not a mere indulgence in verbosity. There is something deep and exhuberant in the beauty that she conveys.

However, critics of Sarojini Naidu identified her poetry and its tendency to be pre-dominantly romantic, with British Romanticism. Thus when she captured the "luscious atmosphere of the Indian tropics in Coromondal Fishers, "it reminded the critic of "Tennyson's Lotus Eaters."

Even while conceding that "behind her poetry is the whole lot of deep and pervasive tradition of classical Sanskrit aestheticians, who considered poetry to be an enactment of the paradigmatic essences of beauty," it was maintained that Sarojini Naidu "was extensively and formatively influenced by English Romantic poets like Wordsworth and Shelley and Keats in particular."

Similarly Dr. Amarnath Jha attributed "the voice of sadness and melancholy" in Sarojini Naidu's poetry to the influence of Coleridge, Shelley, Tennyson, and Swinburne.

118 *infra.*, 'The Vakrokti School of Poetics', Chapter II.


This confusion is further extended in P.E. Dustoor's criticism of Sarojini Naidu's poetry. He concedes that "Sarojini Naidu is not in spirit, an English poet at all. The songs she sings are a singular outburst of the oriental spirit in English verse" and yet Dustoor maintains that, "there are, in fact, distinct echoes in her work of Shelley and Swinburne and Tennyson. Her love lyrics may well pass for the outpourings of a more passionate Elizabeth Barret Browning..."  

Another critic, M.K. Naik attributed the persistent strain of imitation of Sarojini Naidu's poetry to an "aping" of the British Romantic poets.  

Of all the critical judgements passed on the poetry of Sarojini Naidu none is more unfortunate than the charge that her descriptions of India do not correspond to the realities of Indian life. For instance the critic Paul Verghese is inclined to see a "Kipling's India" in her poetry. This confusion arises from the mistaken assumption that to be 'realistic' is to talk about poverty, hunger, frustration, caste oppression, lethargy and ignorance, and that a poet who is "enchanted by the rhythmic flow of Indian life is dwelling in an unreal world." Thus Nizzim Ezekiel, a critic of repute remarks that "Sarojini Naidu knew nothing of the literary revolution taking place in English poetry.

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in the twenties and earlier."^{126}

The 'new critics' represented by P. Lal and his 'Workshop Writers' argued that Sarojini Naidu's poetry was "clumsy, incongruous and sentimental... and that... the phase of Indo-Anglian romanticism ended with Sarojini Naidu... leaving fireflies to dance through the neem..."^{127} Obviously the critic in his anxiousness to keep pace with the modern Western age under-estimated the continuity of Indian life in Sarojini Naidu's poetry. The weavers, hawkers, village-girls, gypsies, bangle-sellers, mendicants, pilgrims are all real men even today in Indian life. The papeeha's love-calls, the Koel's celebration of the arrival of the first mango blossoms, the peacock's dance of welcome in the honour of the monsoon are all popular features of Indian bird-life. The grinding of sandal wood, henna and spice for the lily-like fingers of the bride, the weaving of flowers by flower-girls for the "brow of a bride-groom", the making of wristlets, rings and bells for the feet of "blue pigeons" are all part of Indian village life even today.

But critical assessment of Indian English Poetry never takes into account the deeper significance of Indian life and how they are expressed in the poems written in English by Indians, through its structure, emotion, suggestions and art. The valuations may be apt for what is observed in the given framework but what is important is that they miss or overlook a whole lot of the universe of Indian

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^{127} P. Lal, Modern Indian Poetry in English, An Anthology (Writers' Workshop, Calcutta, 1969) p. xii.
English poetry. As a result critical opinions remain sharply divided and confused, revealing neither theories, canons nor any shared assumptions to which we can appeal for corroboration.

Thus we shall see that the poetry of the last poetess selected here for study, namely, Kamala Das (1934-), also suffers owing to a lack of adequate assessment.

Kamala Das was born in Malabar in Kerala, and brought up in Calcutta. She also spent some years in Bombay and Delhi after marriage, before settling down in Kerala, where she lives now. Unlike Toru Dutt and Sarojini Naidu, Kamala Das acquired proficiency in the use of English Language, while rooted entirely in the Indian soil. She wrote and still writes in English out of a purely Indian experience with no constant, inward or organic connection with English as a living language.

Kamala Das is in fact one of the few bilingual writers, writing in English. She wrote in her mother tongue Malayalam under the pseudonym Madhavikutty, though now-a-days she keeps her original name. She won the Kerala Sahitya Akademi Award for her Malayalam novel 'Thanuppu' in the year 1967. She has also published many poems in the Malayalam weekly 'Mathrubhumi' and continues to do so even today. Her autobiography 'Ente Katha' (My Story) originally published in Malayalam became a bestseller. So that by the time she started writing actively in English, Kamala Das had already established her position as a successful creative writer in Malayalam.128

128 As a full-length biography of Kamala Das is not available, information about her life has to be pieced together from biographical references in articles, essays and introduction to her works.
Kamala Das has published three books of verse in English so far. The first book entitled 'Summer in Calcutta' published in 1965 has a collection of fifty poems. The second volume titled 'The Descendants' published in 1967 contains twenty-three poems. The third volume titled 'The Old Playhouse and other Poems' published in 1973 has a collection of thirty-three poems. Her 'Collected Poems: Volume one' appeared in 1984 and has eighty-eight poems in all, including some new poems.

Kamala Das is a member of the P.E.N. All India Centre and the winner of the Poetry Prize of the Asian Authology Volume 'I' sponsored by the Philippine Centre of the P.E.N.\textsuperscript{129} Nominated unsuccessfully for the 1984 Nobel Prize for literature, she, however, won the 1985 Aasan Memorial World Prize for Literature, as well as the prestigious 1985 Sahitya Akademi Award for poetry in English. Today, undoubtedly, Kamala Das is one of the foremost woman poets writing in English.

The inspiration, theme, imagery of her works are all entirely and wholly drawn from the poetess's experiences as an Indian. While Toru Dutt searches for the meaning of life in the myths and legends of Hindustan, and Sarojini Naidu in the natural, the picturesque and the beautiful life of India, Kamala Das searches for the meaning of life 'in the horror, boredom and glory beneath ugliness and beauty',\textsuperscript{130}

\textsuperscript{129}cf: H.M. Williams, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 116.

\textsuperscript{130}cf: T.S. Eliot, \textit{The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism} (London, 1964), p. 111: "The essential advantage for a poet is not, to have a beautiful world with which to deal: it is to be able to see beneath both beauty and ugliness; to see the boredom, and the horror, and the glory".
of life. It starts from her own experience as a woman of the Nair community of Kerala.

Kamala Das was born into a tradition, where, there are given expectations, staid and sedate expectations of how a woman or a girl ought to eat, dress and behave. Even as a child, when she went to her ancestral house, she had to wear clothes that hid her legs for "the ladies at Nalapat were conservative, puritanical and orthodox". It was customary for a woman of her family, to marry at an early age, when she hardly even knew what a married life was. "It was also customary for the much older husband to give her a rude shock by his sexual haste on the wedding-night". So that married life came to be associated with "violence and bloodshed." The woman was not expected to exercise her free will, or to assert herself or to challenge the male commands. She was a puppet in the hands of man throughout her life. So that the woman was perpetually, sexually and mentally in a humiliated condition. The woman's individuality eventually got lost in the dreary household routines. Kamala Das's poem 'An Introduction' recounts her experience as a woman belonging to this tradition:

... I was a child, and later they told me I grew, for
I became tall, my limbs swelled and one or two places sprouted hair. When I asked for love, not knowing what else to ask for, he drew a youth of sixteen into

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132 Ibid., p. 33.
133 Ibid., p. 22.
the Bedroom and closed the door. He did not beat me. But my sad woman body felt so beaten...
I shrank Pitifully. Then, I wore a shirt and my Brother's trousers, cut my hair short and ignored My womanliness. Dress in sarees, be girl, Be wife, they said. Be embroider, be cook, Be a quarreler with servants. Fit in. Oh Belong, cried the categorizers.¹³⁴ Like the woman of her family, at the end of this experience she felt "broken". As a result of her personal suffering her search now extended to the world outside her house. In vain, for she could see only frustrations and unhappiness everywhere. Her poems are a testimony of her discoveries.

The collection of poems in the volume 'Summer in Calcutta' picture a world which is hot and harsh, full of smells of rotten garbage and death. The poem 'The Wild Bougainvillas' describes vividly "the sights, the sound and the smells" (p. 51), she picked up while she walked through streets beside the sea:

... I smelt the smell of dying things and the Heavy smell of rotting Dead, I walked on streets where the nightgirls with sham Obtrusive breasts sauntured And under yellow lamps, up and down wandered Beaming their sickly smiles

¹³⁴ Kamala Das, Summer in Calcutta (New Delhi, 1965), pp. 39-40. Further reference to poems from this book will be made in the parenthesis by the page numbers.
At men (p. 16)
However, the poetess was happy when she came to the old cemetery behind her house and at the sight of
... some marigolds bloom and the
Wild red bougainvillae
Climbing their minarets. (p. 17)

Kamala Das's poem 'The Dance of Eunuchs' conjures up a sterile world where eunuchs dance with
... wide skirts going round and round, cymbals
Richly clashing, and anklets jingling, jingling
jingling. Beneath the fiery gulmohur, with
Long braids flying, dark eyes flashing, they danced...
Tatoos on their cheeks, jasmine in their hair,
some were dark and some almost fair
... a drought and a rottenness
Were in each of them. Even the crows were so
Silent on trees, and the children, wide eyed,
still, All were watching these poor creatures'
convulsions. (p. 9)
The poem vividly transforms into poetry the dance, so that the whole scene seems to come alive before us. Kamala Das's sensitive eyes and ears do not miss much. Her amazingly observant eye as well as her remarkable capacity to capture the details without rhetoric or sentimentality, but with a sense of irony closely allied to pathos is amply evident in her poetry. 135

135 Intra., Chapter III, pp. 154-165, et passim.
The poem 'Visitors to the City' captures a scene she witnessed one morning on Strand Road. As the poem opens, we see carts drawn by ox, with their bells ringing, come through the "winter-mist" raising the "red-dust". These are followed by

Proud, heavy-turbaned men and their wives with
Tattooed cheeks, silver on their arms and fat
Babies dozing at their
Breasts. (p. 27)

The poetess stood watching the scene "until the last cart went round the bend", and the "red-dust settled on the road", and "silence". The suddenness of the word "silence" here seems to echo through the mind of the reader.

In another poem 'Delhi', the poetess describes a scene she witnessed on an evening from her house on a Delhi Street:

Our house crouches in dust in the
Evenings when the buffaloes tramp
Up the Road, the weary herdsmen
Singing soft Punjabi songs, and
Girls from free municipal schools
Pause shyly at our gate and smile.136

The poetess stood "mute" not knowing what to say to the school-girls who were like "the shrine of peace". This thought immediately brought to her reminiscence of the kind of life she leads:

... We
Are paltry creatures, utter snobs,
who disowned our mothers only

136 Kamala Das, My Story, op. cit., p. 140.
Because their hands, we noticed, were
Work-worn, and so to seek richer
Mothers and better addresses
We must move on, and on, until
We too, someday, by our children
May be disowned...

The poem 'The Bangles' depicts the story of a "sweeper's wife" who sought love, "but find love not enough". She has a husband, "the pock-marked man who/Took her in". In front of their house "she hangs some/Mango-leaves", hoping "They will bring us luck". Yet at night "the woman lashes/At pillows with bangled arms, in vain". When she died, she was "decked with one rupee worth of/Yellow flowers" which the dark boy below her flat sold on the streets for "Two annas per string". (p. 34)

The poetess gives a new treatment to the theme of frustration in the poem 'The Flag'. Here the poetess contrasts the high ideals symbolized by the tri-colour national flag with the false glamour and corruption that take place beneath it on the "city's fevered lanes", where

Rich men dance with one anothers wives and
Eke out a shabby,
Secret ecstasy, and, poor old men lie
On wet pavements and
Cough, cough their lungs out. Yet there is whisky
on breath of winds
... Poor flag, dear one
... ... hide
Your shame beneath this blood-drenched Indian soil
And lie there and rot
As those poor babies who die of hunger
And are buried, rot... (p.21-22)

In the poem 'Farewell to Bombay' the poetess bids farewell to the city of Bombay and engages in a conversation with it:

I take leave of you, fair city, keep your tears
Your anger and your smile for others,
Young, who come with unjaded eyes;
Give them your sad-eyed courtesans with tinsel
And jasmine in their hair, your marble
Slabs in morgues... (p. 39)

Kamala Das's other poems such as 'The Freaks', 'In Love', 'The End of Spring', 'A Relationship', 'Spoiling the Name', 'Too Early the Autumn Sights', 'With its Quiet Tongue', 'Bats', 'Gino', 'Glass', 'The Stone Age', 'My Morning Tree', 'Captive', 'Loud Posters' and so on, explore the theme of love in relation to her unhappy experience in life. For instance consider the lines from the poem 'Captive':

My love is an empty gift, a
Gilded empty container, good
for show, nothing else. 137

The dark despair in life led the poetess to explore the theme of death. Like the Indian Philosopher of the Vedanta School of Philosophy 138 she discovers that death is only "just a/Temporary phase

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138 cf: Laila Jayachandra, Kamala Das's Poetry - A Transcendental Vision (Unpublished) M Phil dissertation (Centre of Linguistics and English, School of Languages, Jawaharlal Nehru University, 1986
which/Brings no loss", and that what was
Here before sun-down will
Be here tomorrow when
Light shall reveal it.
I shall loss not a thing (p. 61)

The poems published in her second volume 'The Descendants' by and
large dwell on the question of 'body' and 'soul', and to arrive at a meaning
of life and death. Taking inspiration from the metaphysical symbolism of the
Vedanta, the poetess arrives at the transcendental philosophy. At the end
of the discovery she expressed her desire to disentangle from the clutches
of the material world and submit her 'soul' to the 'seas', in the poem 'The
Suicide', for the poetess believes that:

Only the souls know how to sing
At the vortex of the sea
for both the 'soul' and the 'sea' are one and the same. 139

Some of the other poems which dwell on this theme are 'Advice to
Fellow Swimmers' and 'Composition'.

The poetess's entry into the transcendental sphere, takes her to
Indian mythology. She is, as if, now in a transmuted stage. She brings forth
characters like Radha and Krishna from the Vishnu Purana. As if in a state of
trance akin to the Bhakti Tradition she sings in praise of Ghanashyam, another
name for Krishna:

O Shyam, My Ghanashyam
With words I weave a raiment for you
With songs a sky
With such music I liberate in the oceans

or the ocean is referred to as God or Vishnu, "who moves in the
waters..."
their fervid dances.  

The poems entitled 'Radha', 'Vrindavan', 'Maggots', 'Radhakrishna', and 'Krishna' are further instances of her preoccupation with this theme.

The poem 'Lines Addressed to a Devadasi', shows the poetess's awareness of the Devadasi custom of South India, while the poem 'An Apology to Gautama' reveals her familiarity with the legend of Lord Buddha.

Kamala Das's most favourite subjects, however, are those related to her experiences in her ancestral home in Malabar, Kerala. The poem 'A Hot Noon in Malabar' pictures the life around her house during the afternoon. While the people have their noon siesta, "beggars with whining voices" tramp the road. Again it is a time for

... men who come from hills
With parrots in a cage and fortune-cards
All stained with time, for brown Kurava girls
With old eyes, who read palms in light singsong voices, for bangle-sellers who spread
On the cool black floor those red and green and blue Bangles... (p. 47)

The poem 'Evening at the Old Nalapat House' depicts the old house in which nobody lives now. The poetess recounts the scene she witnessed, when she visited the house on an evening:

No lamps are lit at the Nalapat House
When the first star comes, only the fireflies

Light up the stone steps and their potted plants. The poetess remembers how as a child, "a long time ago" she used to play in the courtyard of this house whose doors are now barred. The old trees have been "cut down and sold", and only the thick roots remain "bruised by memories".

In the poem 'My Grandmother's House' the poetess remembers with nostalgia the house of her grandmother who died, leaving the house in silence, and where now only

... snakes moved

Among books I was then too young

To read.

The poetess moves through the old house enveloped in "darkness" and wishes that she could take some of the darkness to her house in which she lives now with her husband to "lie behind my bedroom door like a brooding Dog."

One of the central figures in Kamala Das's work is her great-grandmother. The poem 'Blood' paints a vivid picture of the grand old lady, who used to recite to the poetess accounts of

... how she rode her elephant

When she was ten or eleven

Every Monday without fail

To the Siva shrine

And back to home again

And the brocade from the north

And the perfumes and the oils

\[141\textit{Ibid.}, \ p. \ 38.\]

\[142\textit{Ibid.}, \ p. \ 120.\]
And the sandal for her breasts
And her marriage to a prince
Who loved her deeply for a lovely short year
And died of fever, in her arms.\textsuperscript{143}

The poem 'Nani' on the other hand reflects the "accursed" Nair tradition, in which the Nair men were licensed to have illicit relationships with other women. The poem depicts the story of a maid -servant who became pregnant through such a relationship and how she hanged herself to death out of shame. What is focussed here is the casual attitude in which the women of the house treated this situation, as if there was nothing unusual about the incident:

Nani the pregnant maid hanged herself
In the privy one day. For three long hours
Until the police came, she was hanging there.

... Another
Year or two, and I asked my grandmother
One day, don't you remember Nani?
... Grandmother
Shifted the reading glasses on her nose
And stared at me. Nani, she asked, who is she?
With that question ended Nani.\textsuperscript{144}

Some of the poems Kamala Das wrote, out of her rememberance of things past are those associated with her childhood days, which she describes as "that honey-coloured day of peace"(p. 43). For

\textsuperscript{143} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 120.

\textsuperscript{144} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 18.
instance the same poem, recounts the picnic at Victoria Garden, to which she and her classmates were taken in the school days, and how she,

.. lay hidden

By a hedge, watching the steel-white sun
standing lonely in the sky (p. 43)

While the other girls were "sipping sugar-cane" in merriment at a distance, and her teacher remarking "What a peculiar child you are".

In the poem 'Drama', the poetess remembers the drama she and her cousins acted as children back home in Kerala. She performed the role of the "Tragdienne", Draupadi of Mahābhārata. In the drama the poetess had to appear taking "vague steps, black gowned, black veiled, and wail and beat my breast and speak of unrequited love". But the poetess played the role in such a way that it awoke laughter from the audience. The poetess then compares this incident of her childhood with her present condition in life:

There is no such stage today; no
Footlights, no veil, no lamp shining
Like a crimson sun (p. 62)

In the poem 'To a Big Brother', the poetess remembers fondly her brother who is about to be married. While in the poem 'A Requiem for my Father', she remembers the time in a hospital in Kerala just before and after her father's death. This is how she begins the poem:

Father, I want to remember only the good,
Only the good and the happy
For nine days and nights you were on the rack
While your secret foes came to watch you die
In Kerala the dying have no privacy.\textsuperscript{145}

Note again how the poetess fondly says:
This time for Onam, I shall not decorate my floor
With flowers, father, for I dressed your chest
with jasmine
When you died a few weeks ago.

From this assessment of the poetical achievements of Kamala Das, it is very clear that her poetry is on the whole based on her experience as an Indian.\textsuperscript{146}

It must be however, mentioned that there are a few poems Kamala Das wrote on the Tamil ethnic issue in Colombo, Sri Lanka, such as 'Smoke in Colombo', 'The Sea at Galle Face Green' and 'After July'. In these poems she expresses her deep shock at the wanton killings of men, women and children of Tamil origin, and asks in desperation:

Did the Tamils smell so
Different, what secret
Chemistry let them down?
Was there a faint scent of
Jasmine in their women's Hair?
But how did they track
Down the little ones whose
Voices rose each morning

\textsuperscript{145} \textit{Ibid.}, pp. 39-40.
\textsuperscript{146} \textit{Infra.}, Chapter III, pp. 165-197.
With the national flag. 147

In these poems, though they touch upon a scenery in another country, the concern is that of an absolute faithfulness to the high ideals of universal brotherhood reflected in Indian thought and philosophy.

Unfortunately, Kamala Das has been the most misunderstood poetess. Critics of her poetry invariably associate her poetry with Western Modern Poetry, "adjusted and attuned to the temper of the new age of Hopkins, Yeats, Eliot, Auden, Dylan Thomas, perhaps also Allen Tate and Wallace Stevens... (who) taught our poets the importance of taking their art seriously." 148 It is surprising that a critic of repute like Srinivasa Iyengar, should see the effort of M. Elias 149 to study and place the poetry of Kamala Das in the context of the Nair heritage of Kerala, as a "sluething after her Malabar antecedents." 150 On the other hand the critic points out that, "it is more rewarding to read the poetry itself, and remember lines like..." from her poem 'Composition'. One is at great difficulty here to make sense out of this suggestion.

Devindra Kohli who to-date has made the only comprehensive study of Kamala Das's poetical achievement turns aside the whole idea of the Indianness of her poetry with the comment that:

The fact is that she does not strive to be

147 Collected Poems, p. 12.
148 Iyenger, op. cit., p. 649.
150 Iyenger, op. cit., pp. 712-713.
Indian and neither her themes nor her language
have any consciously Indian flavour in it.\textsuperscript{151}

Perhaps as M. Elias pointed out, this comment of Kohli, may be logical
in the sense that Kamala Das's Indianness is obscure "because it is
dark and Dravidian".\textsuperscript{152} Kohli on the other hand maintains that Kamala
Das is "essentially a poet of the modern Indian woman's ambivalence
giving expression to it more nakedly and as a thing-in-itself than any
other Indian woman poet."\textsuperscript{153} This may be true. But then no where
in the book does he talk of any Indian woman poet living or dead!
On the other hand he brings in the example of the Australian poet,
Judith Wright to substantiate his point!

The critic M.K. Naik's rather one-sided criticism of Kamala
Das's poetry, concentrates on "the uninhibited frankness with which
she talks about sex", and express the fear that her "constant harping
upon sex" has unfortunately "obscured her few but sensitive poems".\textsuperscript{154}
The critic then concludes by comparing Kamala Das's poetry with that
of the English poet Browning, pointing out that "many of Kamala Das's
love poems have a Browningesque dramatic quality".

The critic A.N. Dwivedi in his analysis of Kamala Das's poetry
conceded that "Kamala Das wrote her poetry against a more conservative

\textsuperscript{151} Devindra Kohli, \textit{Kamala Das} (Indian Writers Series, New Delhi,
1975), p. 121.

\textsuperscript{152} M. Elias, \textit{op.cit.}, p. 17. cf: Kamala Das, \textit{My Story}, \textit{op.cit.},
p. 109., \textit{Collected Poems} \textit{op.cit.}, p. 96: "Like white suns in
the swell of my Dravidian blood/secretly flow the drains
beneath sacred cities."

\textsuperscript{153} Devindra Kohli, \textit{op.cit.}, p. 27.

\textsuperscript{154} M.K. Naik, \textit{A History}, \textit{op.cit.}, pp. 208-209.
and tradition bound culture than that of Judith Wright. Instead of analysing this cultural background, the critic ends up by saying that "like Jane Austen she trod the familiar path, and wrote with grace and skill within her limited range".

Critics unanimously club Kamala Das's writings with that of "Anne Sexton, Sylvia Plath and Judith Wright" for their 'confessional' note, and refuse to see any other note or tendency in her poetry. Judging by the dictionary definition, her poetry does in fact record her personal experiences in life. But as Kamala Das herself puts it, "a poet's raw material is not stone or clay, it is her personality". Again to say that it is "confessional" is not to say much. It is the nature of confession that has to be explored, and its relationship to the native tradition. Moreover, one may find in the Pali sermons of the Buddha and what may be referred to as the Prakrit Brhatkatha, a concern for the individual person. Again Indian poems written in the twelfth century and afterwards were highly emotional and personal. For instance, note the poetry of Akkamahadevi, a woman saint of twelfth century Karnataka, who was married to a local king.

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156 Iyengar, op. cit., p. 712.
157 cf: J.A. Cuddon, op.cit., p. 152: "Confessional - is a record of poet's states of mind and feelings and his vision of life... However some poems are more overtly self-revelatory, more detailed in their analytical exposition of pain, grief, tension and joy...".
158 Kamala Das, My Story, op.cit., p. 139.
but left him in search of her true lover, the God Śiva. 160

O Sir, I love the beautiful one,
The formless one, who is beyond
Or death or dissolution
The beautiful one,
The fearless, dauntless one,
Who is past birth...
All other husbands in the world
Are naught to me! (p. 18)

Compare this attitude with the concern shown in the poetry of Kamala Das, in which she turns from the bondages of worldly life to the God, Krishna:

What is the use
Of Love, all this love
This skin communicated
Thing that I dare not
... call our love. 161

But turning to Krishna, she says
Your body is my prison, Krishna
I cannot see beyond it.
Your darkness blinds me
Your love words shut out the wise world's din. 162

It is quite obvious here that the expression of personal experience is not just a feature to be found only in some Western writers, but

161 Summer in Calcutta, op.cit., p. 20.
162 Collected Poems, op.cit., p. 75.
that it is a feature present in Indian poetry too.

Thus, we notice from the above survey of the poetical achievements of Toru Dutt, Sarojini Naidu and Kamala Das, and also from an assessment of the critical studies of their poetry, that there is a near total lack of co-relation, between what the poetesses sought to convey and what the critics projected of them. The three poetesses appear at different periods in history. Each poetess comes with her own habit of thought and taste, which are bound to reflect in their poetry in a special way. Further, the poetry of each poetess is invariably conditioned by her own leaning to the respective trend of her own idea about the nature of things. This ideal that a poetess may aim at, may be called her poetic theme. In this sense it is possible to speak of the poetry of Toru Dutt, or Sarojini Naidu or Kamala Das.

Hence the immediate task before us is to analyse the poetics as available in the Indian tradition, and then try to apply it to a few selected poems of Toru Dutt, Sarojini Naidu and Kamala Das with a view to discovering the poetics of each poetess. These findings will then hopefully become the basis for constructive criticism of their poetry.