The bulk of Indian English Poetry is as different and as varied as life in the subcontinent itself. There are poems in different forms containing a wide range of themes. The themes include patriotism, freedom, mythology and religion, god, man, nature and the depiction of events of significance from the past, of present and future.

The Indian English poets have done themselves and their country proud by effectively integrating a foreign medium and native rhythms of life. The Indian writers use the English language, which is a legacy of colonial times. One finds vast material both creative and critical coming out of press every year.

It is interesting to find that Indian poetry in English serves the twin purposes of being aesthetic and functional. Tagore’s *Gitanjali* is a fine example. For, besides being highly imaginative in drawing images of excellence, it strives to arrive at practical conclusions regarding debatable issues such as our conception of freedom, God and death. Some poets used this medium as a powerful weapon to combat British authority in India.

They have used traditional as well as modern forms in their work. The outcome is that today there is an impressive segment of Indian English poetry in TORU DUTT, who also died young, handled writing poetry in French and English with equal ease, Edmud Gossee praises her collection of poems in English entitled *Ancient Ballads* and
Ledgends of Hindustan. She drew inspiration from *The Ramayana, The Mahabharata* and *The Bhagavadgita*. Her short but highly evocative poem Sita is considered as “the unflinching lamp” throwing light on the quality of her heart. The picture of sad Sita, Rama’s consort and queen, in the sage Valmiki’s hermitage. Toru is nostalgic of her childhood and of her brother and sister.

Toru drew from Greek mythology to create a unique poem, The Lotus. It is written in the form of a Petrarchan sonnet: “Love came to Flora asking for a flower—There is strife in Psyche’s bower.” And, “And Flora gave the Lotus, rose-red dyed/and lily-white, queenliest flower that blows.”

Commonwealth Literature. Prominent among the early Indian English poets are, Henry Derozio, Toru Dutt, Sri Aurobindo, Sarojini Naidu, and Rabindranath Tagore.

RABINDRANATH TAGORE, popularly known as Gurudev, is remembered for his versatility. He was a poet of no mean stature. It wouldn’t be an exaggeration to say that India went global as a literary force to contend with, Tagore’s Nobel Prize winning *Gitanjali*, a slim volume of devotional poems. It is written in the form of vaishnava and Shiva poets, who seek God as a child seeks its mother or as a lover seeks his beloved. Its imagery, the experience and the revelation are Indian to the core. The very first line strikes the right note thus: “Thou has made me endless, such is/they pleasure.”

*Gitanjali* is a renaissance poem. It is novel in every aspect. It treats the relationship between man and God, man and Nature and links the three together in a hitherto unknown manner. The poet depicts life as a journey, a quest or a waiting to realize union with God. The technique of versification, the imagery therein are one of
their kind. It is written as a series of prose lyrics. Yet it makes better music than some traditional poems. The abundant and apt use of imagery especially of nature creates fine words pictures. The devotee is a ‘little flower’. He is like a ‘July cloud unshed showers.’ His soul’s flight is like the flight of ‘a flock of home-sick cranes’ towards their ‘mountain nests.’

Tagore conceived God and His grandeur as omnipotent: “Thou art the sky and thou art the nest as well.” He is not found in the “lonely, dark corner of a temple “but” He is there where the tiller is tilling the hard ground/and where the path-maker is breaking stones.”

Gitanjali is one of the finest Indian English poems ever attempted. Its short lyrical form consisting of a series of fine word pictures, treating topics of universal significance and bringing home a finer experience certainly makes a lasting impact on the reader’s mind. It is indeed ‘another Easter wonder’ although decades passed since it was first published.

SRI AUROBINDO’S works of art. Especially Savitri, is an example for the above definition of poetry. According to C.D. Narsimhiah, Sri Aurobindo “made the English language accommodate certain hither to unknown areas of experience both through his prose work ‘Life Divine’ and through his epic ‘Savitri’ not to speak of the numerous translations from Sanskrit poetry and drama as well as his less known but important works.”

It is foregone conclusion that Savitri is a landmark in the realms of Indian poetry in English. It is a poem that stands ‘motionless in time.’ It is more than a parallel to the Divine Comdey of Dante and Milton’s Paradise Lost. Both innovative
and enlightening Savitri contains single and entire action in three parts. It is the story of Satyavan whose fate of death is conquered by Savitri, the much prayed for daughter of Ashwapathi, a king and a sage. With her indefatigable will she brings him back to life. Savitri is a symbol. She is light, she is knowledge. She leads the human soul from darkness to light, she is knowledge. She leads the human soul from darkness to light, from ignorance to knowledge, to wisdom.

SAROJINI NAIDU’S contribution to Indian English poetry may not level with that of Sri Aurobindo, but it certainly establishes her as a pioneer poet of Indian English poetry. Her poems adequately prove her ability to voice the vicissitudes of life. Life to Sarojini is an admixture of joy and sorrow.

Her mystic fervor comes through in lines like: ‘The flower deferred, the fruit den red,/and not the peace supremely won ......,’ and one of her volumes of poetry. Bird of Time, contains magical lines such as: “The fragrant piece of twilight’s breath,/And mystic silence that men call death.....” Personal element apart Sarojini Naidu’s poems like Indian Weavers, Bangle Sellers and Palanquin Bearers are studded with aspects of native life and traditional practices peculiar to India.

HARINDRANATH CHATTOPADHYAYA, younger brother of Sarojini Naidu, is a poet in his own right. His concern for life and death made him a mystic poet. His poetry is voluminous consisting of verbal and metrical facility.

The shift from themes like freedom, patriotism and religion to issues related to the common man’s lot is clearly marked in the post-independence and modern Indian English poetry. Depiction of poverty, meaningless traditional practices and religious beliefs, corrupt politics and social-injustice- India in all its moods and miseries comes
vibrantly alive in the poems of the present age. When one goes through the maze of
poetry, one feels that the Indian English poet has finally arrived. He no longer apes his
English counterparts or his predecessors. He is free from stereotype. His poetry is
truly the ‘criticism of life.’ Such poets who dwell on the idiosyncrasies of life range
from well-known versifiers like Kamala Das, Nissim Ezekiel, A.K. Ramanujan, R.
Parthasrathi, Jayanta Mahapatra, Arun Kolatkar to the less known but impressive
writers such as O.P. Bhatnagar, and G.S. Sharat Chandra.

To the lovers of Indian English poetry, Kamala Das’s is a household name. Her
poetic output which fetched her the Central Sahitya Academy Award, has included
sharp criticism for its unparalleled frankness hither to kept under wraps. Her poems
include both personal and objective elements.

Kamala Das’s Punishment in the Kindergarten deserves praise for its depiction
of change in the poet from petulance to peace. Skilful choice of words renders the
poem authentic. She recalls that particular day in kindergarten, when her teacher threw
words at her like “pots and pans’ and drained” that honey coloured day of peace.” So
she “hid her face in the sun-warmed hedge/and smelt the flowers and the pain.” years
later, as a result of life’s chastening experiences, she says, “My mind has found/An
adult peace.”

NISSIM EZEKIEL declared that he would “sing the song” of his “experience.”
Only he did it in impressive poetry. His Sahitya academy award is a deserving mark
of recognition of life in all its shades. Ezekiel wrote on beggars, hutment dwellers, and
pavement sleepers of Bombay. He is popular for various reasons. Simplicity, common
topics, interesting words and word pictures and aesthetic appeal are the obvious features of his poetry.

Ezekiel is at his ironic best in his poems like Night of the Scorpion. An ordinary incident combined with the gift of story telling becomes a poem of great interest. It accurately catches the mind the milieu typical of the Indian country-side. A whole philosophy is fitted into the words of the villagers sitting around the groaning mother suffering from the sting of the ‘diabolic’ creature. The villagers coming in ‘swarms’, chanting the name of god a hundred times, and the refrain, ‘they said’, magnifies a common enough incident, but elegantly and convincingly. Here lies the touch of rarity in Ezekiel’s poems.

Nissim Ezekiel may not be the quintessential Indian poet and might not have played a major role in creating a poetic tradition. Yet, it is beyond doubt that his poems not only provide great trading pleasure but also become source of inspiration for budding poets.

“I only known how to work at one poem at a time, stitch by stitch”, says A.K. RAMANUJAN, who lived in America but wrote on his Indian experience. Like Ezekiel, he too poeticirod a variety of subjects. Quite few of his poems are strongly nostalgic of Indian past. Irony is a by-word in his poems.Ramanujan has been applauded for his impeccable transiations from Tamil and Kannada like Allama Prabhu.

A harsh reality is effectively portrayed in his famous poem, A River. It shows in graphic terms the unchanging tragic fate of the poor every year. Even the poets turn a blind eye to the calamity, along with the uncerned authorites. They was over the
rising floodwater and do not pay attention to, “The three villages houses, one pregnant woman/and a couple of cows named Gopi and Brinda” carried away by it.

Just as A.K. Ramanujan who wanted to return to native traditions as expressed in his poem, Conventions in the Dust, “I must seek and will find/my particular hell in my own Hindu mind”, R. PARTHASARTHY has also set a task for himself as a poet. He says, “I saw my task as one of acclimatizing the English language to an indigenous tradition. “He not only followed what he believed, but also urged fellow Indian poets to return to their own linguistic traditions.

Parthsarthy’s long poem, Exile from Homecoming, is a powerful expression of feeling of ‘uncertainties’ of Indian caught between ‘English chains’ and one’s own ‘tired language’. He certainly speaks of the predicament of a generation of sensitive Indians living abroad. Parthasarthy sounds very much like Eliot who also penned poetry of despair and degneration.

Parthasarathy’s originality lies in creating figures such as: “the eye of the needle of forgetfulness”, “the street in the evening tilts homeward”, his eyes peeling off, “the key goes to sleep in my palm”, and so forth.

JAYANTA MAHAPATRA’S poetry serves as an example for Ayyappa Panikar’s comments on India poetry in English that “national sensibilities are ultimately based on racial and cultural factors”. But nature, myth and landscape merge in Mahapatra’s award winning book, Relationship. Even in other poems such as A Monsoon Fable and The Lost Children of America, he links the remembered experiences with native Cuttack. He doesn’t gloss over the ugly details.
ARUN KOLATKAR came under much fire for what the critics consider to be “irreverence” in his poems. His Chitanya and Makarand are unorthodox in being scathingly critical of religious norms. The very roots of certain values seem to be threatened in Makarand.

O.P. Bhatnagar’s poetry appeals to the general Indian reader because of its political and social import. A variety of aspects have been poeticized. In the new British Empire, he writes on national pride: “Wasn’t one Kohinoor in the London/Enough to tease us in our graves?” On political corruption, he writes in Thoughts on Election Day in India: “With a handful literates/stealing illiterate favours in steel boxes..... “In A Lucky Star to Hang on the theme of the gap between the rich and the poor.

G.S. SHARAT CHANDRA, like A.K. Ramanuna, draws from memories of India for his poems. His important work is Heirloom which has 35 poems in it. Like fellow modern Indian poets Sharat Chandra relies heavily on irony in depicting bitter realities.

KEKI N. DARAWALLA (b. 1937) is a major Indian English poet. He has won recognition both at home and abroad. He is known as a poet” ...... with an unusually broad range of technique and a substantial body of work. His poetry is both immediately Indian in reference and universal in its concern with love, death, domination, self-control, self-betrayal and the corruptions that result from social and political accommodation.” His works reveal his distinct Indian perception while sensitively looking at the changing face of India. They capture India, its milieu and people, its society and the national psyche Daruwalla’s modern Indian consciousness
seems to be deeply imbued with rich and varied cultural past of the country past of the country. This becomes explicit in his treatment of the miscellaneous contemporary themes. He seems to be a highly sensitive soul because the displacement caused by partition has left an indelible mark on his psyche. Similarly tension resulting from nature-society interaction could be usually perceived in his personality.


He is acutely conscious of the socio-political cultural reality in India. The reality experienced in India is his occupation and concern. He has rendered his experiences into fine poetic forms by making use of apt and starting imagery taken from different forms of life as well as different branches of knowledge. Actually it would be more correct to say that his poetry abounds in imagery, especially the imagery of violence representing death, disease and suffering.

The reference to the terms ‘symbols’ and ‘metaphors’, generally sounds a literary note. But it is paradoxical to state that even the commoners often make use of these literary devices in their daily life. They need their help for forceful, impressive, illustrative and lucid expression. Hence Kaa Naa Subramanyam states, “the Indian mind thinks in symbols and metaphors” Qaiser Zoha Alam elaborates, “Talking metaphorically or obliquely by implication is, generally speaking, natural with
Indians. In everyday use they often employ imagery as a means of expression, reinforcement, endorsement, illustration, evocation, as also objective correlative.”

Daruwalla has also made use of apt and startling images in this poetry to make it expressive, lucid, forceful, impressive and so on. Deft use of imagery helps him largely in achieving a realistic and ironical tone also. His poetry abounds in expressions like, ‘the mass of liquefied flesh seething in fear’, ‘dynamites the silence’, ‘but memory like crane-arm/unloads its ploughed up rubble’ (Under Orion), ‘the sewer mouth tyrained like a cannon’ (Crossing of Rivers), ‘winter came like a bearded goatherd’, ‘lighted ulcers on the sky’s belly.’ (Winters Poems), ‘a rapist in the harem of the sky’ (The Keeper of the Dead), ‘the sea pants, the islands shoulder, ‘The sun is an egg-yolk flying in the sky’, ‘a wall of rotting muscle’ (Landscapes), and so on. These images have a telling effect on the readers.

Indian English poetry made its humble beginning in 1825 and in course of time it has developed itself into a mature and well distinguished genre of poetry. During the period of more than one & half centuries a number of well known poetic personalities have appeared in this field and they made their substantial contribution to this genre of poetry. Prominent among them are H.L. Derezio, K.P. Ghosh, Michael Madhusudan Dutt, Manmohan Ghose, Sarojini Naidu, Aurobindo Ghose, Harindranath Chattopadhyay, Dom Moraes, Nissim Ezekiel, P. Lal, Shiv Kumar, R. Parthasarathy, A.K. Ramanjuna, K.N. Daruwalla, Kamala Das, Gauri Deshpande, Keshav Malik, O.P. Ghatnagar & R.K. Singh.

A modern Indian English poet generally faces an uphill task while rendering his experiences into poetry. Being a victim of two different traditions and
consciousness—i.e. the modern European consciousness and tradition and inalienable ancient Indian consciousness and tradition, he is required to be cautious in respect of his learning. He is free to draw his images from either of the sources but being an Indian his greater dependences should be on Indian cultural heritage in respect of the use of imagery.

Actually a poet’s sensibility is shaped & moulded by a number of forces. Some of these forces have a favourable impact on his bearing whereas some of them have stinting impact on it. The land in which he is born & brought up, the social cultural religious, political & economic surrounding of his age, generally play a great role in developing his poetic sensibility. A poet generally draws his major concern and occupation from the above said things. Keki N. Daruwalla, is in no doubt an Indian poet by birth and his upbringing, but to a great extent, he is different case so far his cultural and religious background is concerned. As a result it is quiet natural, his attitude and reaction to some of the problems of the contemporary India might be a bit different from those of others.

A poet differs from another poet in respect of the use of the imagery due to several direct and indirect influences. The surrounding in which a poet is born and brought up and finally works, plays a great role in this respect. To be more clear a poet who belongs to the branch of science will certainly employ a large number of images taken from the different branches of science. Similarly a poet born and working in a particular region will generally employ images taken from that particular area. There could be a fewer exceptions to it but on the whole this principal holds good. Daruwalla is no doubt an Indian poet by birth and majority of his images are
Indian but he differs from his other contemporaries in one respect, in the use of his imagery. Images taken from the areas like sex, violence and crime predominate his poetic field. This is the outcome of the field of his work. During the active period of his career he worked as a Police Official and he had to deal with a number of diverse problems related to those fields. Consequently images from those fields have spontaneously flown into his poetry.

To the best of my knowledge no in-depth study has been undertaken in respect of the pattern of imagery in Daruwalla’s poetry, though there is huge scope for it. In this dissertation I have made an humble attempt to undertake an in-depth study of the pattern of imagery in Daruwalla’s poetry.