LANDSCAPE OF POST INDEPENDENCE INDIAN ENGLISH POETRY

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CERTIFICATE

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This is to certify that the dissertation entitled Landscape of Post Independence Indian English Poetry submitted by Manjula Sholapurkar in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of Master of Philosophy has not been submitted previously for the award of any degree of this or any other university

We recommend that this dissertation be placed before the committee of examiners for evaluation .

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G.J.V. Prasad Supervisor

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INTRODUCTION

The word landscape for both its literal extensions and figurative associations is a popular expression with poets as well as ordinary mortals. A word of easy access, however for the associations, generally pleasant, that it evokes in most minds, it resists the wear and tear of hackneyed usage. It remains a comprehensive lexical item charged with multiple meanings and it is in this broad omnibus sense that I use it in the title of my dissertation.

Indian English poetry is rich in references to the topography of the land , and it responds to the stimulus of natural beauty . However it is not mere landscape **beetry** . The density of population for one , would not allow it to be so and secondly in a land with a rich continuity of cultural traditions , It is not just the people with their different lifestyles who make an impact on this writing , but it is also their beliefs , legends , myths and history that have a felt presence between the lines . It is not the sweep of a historian or the generalization of a sociologist that this poetry encompasses , rather very often , it remains just a personal record of the poets' Indian experience with all its contradictions .

Inspite of the omnibus title, it is not possible within the scope of this dissertation, to give a comprehensive survey of Indian English Poetry from 50s to the present day scene. For the purpose of concentrated focus

, I have organized my study into two groups which a little arbitrarily , I treat as two generations. I have further limited the study to three poets in each generation . In What I refer to as the the senior generation , I have taken up the poetry of Nissim Ezekiel (b. 1924), Keki N. Daruwalla (b.1937) and Jayanta Mahapatra (b. 1923). They are established names on the the Indian poetic scene, their's is a sizable body of work published for well over two decades and even more in the case of Nissim Ezekiel. The other three poets are younger and one could even use the word upcoming for them . They are Agha Shahid Ali (.), Sujata Bhatt (b.1956) and Sudeep Sen (b. 1964). The choices have been made with a view to study certain broad patterns of continuities and change in the thematic concerns and poetic strategies explored by the poets over a period of time. This time span is actually only a little over three decades from about the 1960s when Nissim Ezekiel's third volume The Unfinished Man came out to the very immediate '90s . The 90s saw not only the publication of a volume of poetry from each of the younger poets but also Jayanta Mahapatra's latest book A Whiteness of Bone (1992).

Coming to the considerations that guided the choice of poets in the study, I would like to begin with an explanation rearding the grouping of the poets in the younger generation. I am aware that all the three i.e. Agha Shahid Ali, Sujata Bhatt and Sudeep Sen are at present what we call poets with expatriate status ; they belong to the increaing tribe of "deracinated and diasporized poets"¹. This concentration on them to the exclusion of poets at home amounts to somewhat distorted representation

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of the contemporary Indian English poetic scene. However in the achievement of Sujata Bhatt and Agha Shahid Ali , I found a reason to study the whole question of a poet's identity , in terms of nationality and its "transcendence" . Meenakshi Mukherjee makes this point in her essay "Inside the Outsider" in the context of novelist who work with a multicultural consciousness . I find it a useful angle to approach Indian English poetry , especially in the context of increasing "peregrination" or what she calls the "post-national phenomenon "² As oppurtunities for travel and cultural exposure increase it is not even possible or wise to limit poets of home bound and expatriates . It is not that the poets of earlier generation didn't explore the possibilities of a trans-national stance , many of them work with the option or exposure to a stay abroad , yet returned home to a pronounced commitment .

Returning to the stalwarts of the Indian English poetic scene, there are in my presentation many notable exceptions, like R.Parthasarthy, A.K. Ramanujan, and Kamala Das; it is due to the limitations of space and time that I could not make an exhaustive enough study. Owing to the same limitations I have not been able to deal with the very significant writing of other contemporaneous women poets, especially Meena Alexander's work which is very relevant to my focus, but could not be incorporated because of these constraints. However with a select focus on Ezekiel, Daruwalla and Mahapatra, in the first group, my endeavour in this study has been to come to terms with the issue of Indianness as expressed in their poetry. The quality of Indianness in Indian English poetry is often treated as a nebulous matter. Nevertheless I find it to be a helpful angle in understanding the implications of the poets' commitment to the Indian landscape which is often bleak and uninspiring. At other times there are redeeming features too about it , and in its totality it helps the poet define his idiom and identity , as he explores his relationship to its colours and contours.

Nissim Ezekiel is the poet approached first in the study, his contribution has been a pioneering one in shaping and defining the characer of post-Independence Indian English poetry. He brought Indian English Poetry in the mainstream of modern consciousness, infused it with a new vigour by making a decisive break with the earlier idealistic romantic mode of writing, which in any case was quite a spent force by then - especially in the changed socio-political context. In this new setup the values of idealism and collective aspirations were replaced by a culture of self-aggrandizement and inspite of the confidence of recognized national identity³, the deepening socio-political malaise was only too visible, to turn poets / writers towards more realistic modes of expression. In this changed scenario, Ezekiel was a path-breaker in terms of his thematic concerns and techniques. It was an early stage of craftmanship wtih him; the poetry heavily influenced by the British - American twentieth century phase of modernist writing. There was all the same a genuine search for an authentic idiom. As we turn to Keki N.Daruwalla there is a wide range of subjects, styles and locales and this gives a very substantial base for the kind of study that I am interested in . Jayanta

substantial base for the kind of study that I am interested in Jayanta Mahapatra was an inevitable choice notwithstanding the very real challenge of obscurity that his poems continue to pose. Drawing their strength from the specific landscape in which they are rooted, the poems communicate in a manner that I can here define only in the often used word "evocative". His is an instance of the poet who employs the English language in a very individualized manner to convey not only his intellectual response to an Indian way of life, but also his emotional involvement with it. The main body of this dissertation is organized into three chapters where I deal wtih the linguistic ; the socio-cultural and the geoghraphical aspects respectivly, of what I figuratively refer to as the landscape of post-Independence Indian English Poetry.

The choice of English by Indian poets is fortunately no longer debated in tems of - why, the critical focus is however never very far away from this ontological profundity. This is not due to a paucity of critical premises, but because I feel any evaluative criterion for Indian English poetry is closely linked to the limited acceptance that the English language has with the Indian public at large. Inspite of the widespread bureaucratic and academic use it remains for majority of Indians a language foisted from above. This inhibits its full growth even in its Indianized version. The unsettled question of language impinges on the larger acceptance of Indian English literature . G.N. Devy cogently spells out the "issue of the status of English language in India," as he raises the poser, " Is it a foreign language in India ? Is it an Indianised language ? Or is it a language that is international, and hence in that degree Indian ? ... The uncertain status of the language code and the ambivalence of culture code of Indian "writing" in English are closely interdependent. "⁴

If the poet's relationship to the language poses the first problem of critical orientation, the second issue that could well be the genesis of the first one, is the poet's relationship to his indigenous culture. The factors that have equipped him to use a language that to date remains a quasi foreign language to the majority of Indians make his poetic credentials a little suspect in terms of authenticity and social commitment. Considering that the main plank of Indian English poetry readership within the country is the urban educated elite, does this fact further narrow its character to a minority exclusionist coterie poetry? Determining the cultural moorings of the readers is a lesser problem the main problem comes with the attempt to align the dual heritage and consciousness of the poets with the mainstream of Indian society and culture. Such an enterprise is itself hedged in qualifications, given the polycentricity of Indian society, I use the word, mainstream, as an operative concept. Notionally it should be more inclusive than the visible Hindu majority and more cohesive than a conglomeration of regional identities .

Returning to the vexed question of the poet's dual heritage, Indian English poetry undeniably takes on many western influences. This is so in the pervasive sense of the cross-cultural phenomen**g**n called Westernization as well as in the more sophisticated sense of poetic mentors and models ; which of course is a subsequent stage of literary apprenticeship . Western education gave not only a decided edge to those who had access to it , over the general populace but also a critical perspective to their thinking vis-a-vis the native culture . Some of it could be a positive training in objectivity and rational thinking and some of it a new form of colonial domination . In whatever manner we deconstruct the impact of western education ; its outlook and influence , it did not in majority of cases severe the emotional bonds with the mother country . The encounter that takes place between the poetic sensibility trained along Western lines and the Indian backdrop , becomes one of the main questions of critical engagement . Given the troubled heritage it is a relationship fraught with tension , but this tension in most of the cases is a source of creativity .

As we examine the overlapping issues of the poet's self-identity, his orientation and alignment there is in the background the larger issue of literary influence that needs to be referred to . Indian English literature especially poetry, is a comparitively young body of literature and in the absence of what G.N.Devy calls "Support of a [common] culture code "⁵, it appears more rootless than it actually is . Though there is a trend towards recognizing it as essentially regional inspiration like other indigenous literatures , specific native influences on it are not very pronounced . It is an accepted postulate that influence is both conscious modelling and sub-conscious assimilation and in this sense there are diffused native strands , in terms of regional language cultures , folk , oral and the classical sanskrit traditions . However the dominant presence is

that of the Anglo-American literary tradition, for one it is a unified cohesive tradition and secondly the influeces have been there at the more conscious level of poetic craftsmanship and technique. Hence the affinities with the symbolist, the imagist and the mythical modes; the noeromantic confessional poets; the anti-establishment poetry of protest; and the city poets. However given the very different sub-texts of Indian English Poetry and the twentieth century Western literature. It is not very fruitful to extend the comparisons.

While in terms of technique, there continues to be an indebtedness , there is a growing tendency to move out of the literary landscapes of Western literature towards a more homely setting. It is not with the borrowed concept of "Wasteland "that Indian English Poets function, they weave out their own metaphors and symbols in response to a different geographical and psychological dimension. it is in this sense that their poetry is rooted in the land . However, the landscape of India with all its physical, social and cultural determinants is marked by sharp variations. This is not just in terms of geographical relief features - the mountains, the undulations of the dales and river beds, but also the more stark rural - urban divide . Inspite of the mega cities with their daunting skyline that is out to vie with the more affluent cities of the western world, statistics would still put that seventy percent of the Indian population lives in villages. In terms of this sharp polarization, the city based poets response to the rural background takes us back to the problems of socioeconomic determination. It is in the wider context of these unpoetic issues , that the Indian English poet defines his self identity and the orientation of his work . Keeping all these issues in mind , I propose to undertake the study of the landscape and its functions with special reference to Nissim Ezekiel , K.N.Daruwalla , Jayanta Mahapatra , Agha Shahid Ali , Sujata Bhatt and Sudeep Sen .

NOTES

- John Oliver Perry, "Literary Criticism in India : its Multi-Cultural scope and oppurtunities, Especially Relevant To Indian English Poetry "Confederate Gestures : Search for method in Indian Literature Studies, ed. Charu Sheel Singh (New Delhi : Associated Publishing House, 1993) p.10.
- Meenakshi Mukherjee, "Inside the Outsider ", Awakened Conscience : Studies in Commonwealth Literature, ed. C.D. Narasimhaiah (New Delhi, Sterling Publishers, 1978) p.88
- M.K.Naik "The Achievement of Indian English Poetry " *,Dimensions Of English Indian Literature* (New Delhi : Sterling Publishers , 1984) p.9 .
- 4. G.N.Devy "Crisis ? No Crisis ? Indian English Criticism ", Confederate Gestures, ed. Charu Sheel Singh, p.13.
- 5. Ibid .

LANDSCAPE OF LANGUAGE

Indian poets who chose English as their medium find themselves taking up a challenge that extends well beyond the simple issues of linguistic proficiency. The pleasure derived from poetry to a significant extent, is based on linguistic virtuosity, yet it alone is not enough to sustain a poetic oeuvre for long. Words are charged with meaning which is culturally conditioned, but the English language has not had a long or popular enough association with the native cultures in India to be fully sensitized to all the resonances. It is in this respect that the Indian English Poet faces a lacuna ,better referred to as the " cultural lag " ¹ in terms of the possibilities of English language writing in India .

Howsoever proficient or glib the individual poet may be with the English language, his poetry if it has to move out of the groove of private moody ruminations will need to respond to the wider cultural backdrop. The land, the people, their attitudes, their history, all need to be accomodated in some manner and degree. With all these demands the poetic persona assumes a heavy responsibility. He has to be a communicator par-excellence who can competently negotiate the linguistic and cultural codes which unfortunately in the case of Indian English Literature are not in mutually reinforcing accordance (G.N.Devy) ² The problem of mediating between the language and the culture codes is there for the Indian English Prose writer as well. I quote Raja Rao's classic statement on this problem from his 1938 preface to Kanthapura, "to convey in a language that is not one's own, the spirit that is one's own ... English is not really an alien language to us . It is the language of our intellectual make up ... but not of our emotional makeup . " ³ Even today after almost six decades, when there is a lot more Indian Writing in English, this statement is not rendered entirely obsolete. I quote it to highlight the special situation of the Indian English poet, for him it is more of a challenge to get round the emotional gap in communication. He cannot afford wordiness or sentimentality and often resorts to irony as a clincher to get over the dangers of the emotional trap. This is ofcourse a very de-limiting context of in which irony is referred to, but I point it out here only to indicate the difficulties and the self-consciousness of the Indian English poet while he works at maintaining the terse structure of his poem.

With the language and the culture codes of Indian English Poetry being at variance, the problem in communication is bound to be there. The poets function within the constraints of a historically determined situations. If a language has a problematical relationship with the land of its adoption, the tensions are bound to be reflected in its literature and the general perceptions about it. The controversies around the status of Indian English Literature are part of the special context of English in South Asia. A language of the alien rulers, that later was readily appropriated Asia . A language of the alien rulers , that later was readily appropriated by the educated elite , a language of power yet not of the mainstream . In terms of geographical spread , it enjoys the widest coverage in the country , however it remains in a marginal relation to the regional cultures . ⁴

In terms of individual poet's family and educational backgrounds the choice of the medium could be innocuous enough, in majority of cases English happened to be the most viable option available for creative writing . For instance both, Nissim Ezekiel and K.N.Daruwalla have stated thier preference for writing in English in these terms (in their replies to P.Lal's questionnaire)⁵. Given the kind of ambiguous acceptance that English has had with the large cross-section of people and the controversies related to its status that crop up at regular intervals, it is not surprising that a writer's / poet's simple enough choice of the medium was made into a polemical matter in literary reviewing. While Buddhadeva Bose's chastening strictures aghainst writing in English in preference to one's mother tongue may have been more acerbic ⁶, the question why does still come up; not in the garb of any nativistic arguments English but as an evaluative premise. The attitude in this strict criterion of worth is that, Indian English poets should measure up to the achievement of those born to a language or else they are of dubious worth.

This eminently fair expectation glosses over the important fact that the English Language in India is essentially a second language , even in the limited circles it where it is readily incorporated .

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Infact it is the "major site" ⁷ of intellectual discourse , but even this distinction does not equip it to be the ideal medium for creative writing ,for the simple reason that it does not possess the verve and the suppleness of a long spoken idiom

Secondly Indian English, even in the urbane and genteel contexts in which Indian English Poetry is written, is bound to be different from let's say the accepted range of British English usages. The speech patterns differ in intonation and syntax, therefore the conventional features of English prosody, like meter, rhyme, alliteration, enjambment and caesura.⁸ cannot be automatically duplicated in a different ethinic context. It is for this reason that charges of dullness, lack of spontaniety and poor rhythmic sense are often levelled aghainst poets. Nissim Ezekiel's early volumes are cited as instances of constraints that come up due to a none too supple handling of regular (English) metrical forms. Elaborating this point; Christopher Wiseman writes, "... the forms are, in fact, constricting and limiting the conten, not energizing it; ... they are being applied mechanically instead of being employed as useful norms aghainst which to play dynamic variations of pace, shape and sound . "9 William Walsh has high praise for Ezekiel's poetry, he explains the constraints of his earlier writing in terms of " inhibitions ... and the occasional oppressive sense of deliberation " and attributes these to the academic nature of English in India, " a language disconnected from a society constantly using and changing it . "¹⁰

Keki N.Daruwalla's lines also at times brook charges of awkwardness or "extravaghant rhetoric " 11 Jayanta Mahapatra's poems have been taken up as " instances of bad grammar ", of " inept expression " and " weird attributions of parts of speech " ¹². It is not that the charges made are untenable, some of them as pointed earlier are not the result of sloppy craftsmanship, but more the consequence of alterations, howsover marginal that English syntax and phonology undergo as they are handled by Indian users. The charges such as these and others point to the very real difficulties that the Indian English poet faces. Apart from these somewhat valid charges there is the whole nebulae of prejudices in the general mind-set of readers about Indian English literature . Some of these attach themselves to the prefix " Indian English ", which to quote Braj Kachru is not always conducive to "desirable attitudinal connotations ".¹³ These prejudices ultimately cohere in two basic issues, mentioned earlier, viz :

- (a) The competence of the poet (native Indian) in using English
- (b) Competence of the alien language (English) to accomodate the nuances of the native culture

An awareness of these problems manifests itself in both the content and style of many a poem ,at times it takes over the poem entirely. The subsequent part of the chapter is a study of these poems as they project the poets' language centered dilemmas which are both real and contrived as also the strategies employed to cope with them

The focus of this chapter is on examining these strategies that have been evolved by the poets and directed towards overcoming the very real communicative challenges that they face in the special context of Indian English . An attempt is also made to appreciate the dynamism which the indigenizing efforts of the poets infuse in the language . The employment of indigenizing strategies like mimicry , ironic modulation , dramatic presentation , as well as the use of local images , names , code switching and mythological colouring all succeed in giving a trans cultural flexibility to their language .

Nissim Ezekiel's " Very Indian Poems in Indian English " are a good entry points for such study . They belong to *Latter - day Psalms* (1982), prior to that , *Hymns In Darkness* (1976) also contains some of the well known poems like " The Railway Clerk " , "The Truth about the Floods ", and the more famous "Goodbye Party for Miss Pushpa T.S. " . These poems evolve out of the various spoken idioms of Indian English . Most of them convey the distinct speech patterns of middle-class English , there are some pieces that can be seen as experiments at conveying more than one verbal context . This context is not that of English alone , it could be that of any local dialect - the poet's aim is to present it , in an interactive setting . This interactive context brings out both the spoken and the unspoken characterisitics of the total situation in which human protagonists are only one constituent.

"The Truth about the Floods " and "Songs for Nandu Bhende " are instances of such an experiment . In the former poem , " For a visitor / to the flood-affected areas / of Balasore , Mayurbhanj and Cuttack " , getting to the truth is quite " a job " (*Hymns in Darkness*).¹⁴ Replicating the objective tone of media coverage , it says a lot between the lines , while it gives up the task of collating varoius versions to the truth about the floods. The hapless victims of the calamity , as they narrate their tales of woe ; the taciturn officials with their disclaimers " Nature , they said / had conspired aghainst them " ; the odd dotting of students on a relief mission with their curt dispensation and cavalier curiosity and the narrator / reporter himself , who has to establish his credentials with the villagers , that he is not a "government official" ; are all with their different speech registers , part of the objective documentation .

In "Songs for Nandu Bhende" the first piece 'Undertrial Prisoners' is another successful experiment where the language is deliberately used in a simplistic manner with a strict rhyme scheme to convey a complex totality.

The opening lines "Let me show you, friends / a man in jail / they offered him bail / but he didn't have the money / So he lives in jail ", have a gnomic effect, a combination of children's rhyme and the oral manner of a Ballad. As undertrials, the criminal and the casual offender are in same league, condemned as they are to an interminable wait for Justice. The callous imperviousness of the system comes out strongly in these short elliptical lines .

Coming to the poems, that grow out of predominantly urban middle class usage of English, "Good bye Party for Miss Pushpa T.S. " is easily the best known one, for its hugely successful comic effect. The opening lines, "Friends / Our dear sister / is departing for foreign " (*Hymns in Darkness*), set the tone for a sequence of misadventures with English language. However the speaker's abundant goodwill is matched with a blissful assuredness of manner. Spurred on by sentiment, he goes on in the present continuous with his expasiveness. His warmth and apparent senior position warrant a little meandering till he comes to the more specific praise :

> Whenever I asked her to do anything She was saying , ' Just now only , I will do it . ' That is showing good spirit . I am always appreciating the good spirit .

> > (p.191)

Even before the ludcirous effect of this impromptu eloquence can be got over , the poet has a further trick of making it appear more eggregious by making the speaker switch over abruptly to a note of procedural formality :

> Now I ask other speakers to speak , and afterwards Miss Pushpa will do summing up .

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(p.191)

'The Patriot' and 'The Professor' from "Very Indian Poems in Indian English ", are dramatic monologues that Ezekiel builds up in a similar fashion. His conversational renderings are recognizable of the speech pattern of a certain class and age group. Pertaining to it, he has replicated the syntax, the characterisitic expansiveness along with an all comprehensive capacity for weighty pronouncements that range from "Ancient Indian wisdom 100 % correct " to "prospects of world peace " Latter Day Psalms, (p. 237-38). The Patriot and the Professor are characterised in a generalised mould. In the first poem, it is the rhetoric of public concerns that blends with the other traits in the speaker's personality. He is solicitious, spartan, garrulous and of course abundantly good-willed. The Professor's concerns on the other hand are limited to his retired life ; family affairs and his health. He is satisfied that all his children "Are well settled in life", two doing particularly well, "Both have cars ". With these indices of middle class well-being, he also has the satisfaction that " his health is O.K, ... because of sound habits of youth". The Professor rounds off with the customary open-invitation extended in the bonhomie of such chance encounters:

> Visit please my humble residence also I am living just on opposite house's backside.

> > (pp. 238-39)

In the 1983-88 group of poems "Soap" is another such poem that relies on caricatured speech effects, the following lines can be seen as an instance: though in Hindi I 'm saying it , and my Hindi is not so good as my English Please to excuse me but this is defective version of well known brand soap. (pp. 268-69)

Here language is used to deliberately mix up "bad Hindi", "good

English" and "defective soap "in a strange amalgam.

These illustrations are obviously not high poetry, they are caricatures, a little exaggerated and quite ungenerous. However with this reservation in mind , they can be seen as astute renderings of a local spoken idiom that has resulted from the tantalizing quality that English retains for the native users. These poems or rather the simulated speech patterns in them are the results of "transferences" ¹⁵ from regional languages to English - so even for the broad middle class category, there can be many varieties of spoken English. It is not just "clumsiness in syntax and grammar " ¹⁶ alone , but also the other social characteristics that surface in association and altogether they constitute the broad social comedy that is one aspect of these poems . ¹⁷ Seen from that angle these poems are more sardonic in tone and not just funny. I refer to that in detail in the next chapter of this dissertation , that deals with the cultural context of these poems .

Ezekiel exploits the Indian English usages not just for comic effect alone, in the well known poem "The Railway Clerk" there is a touching quality of pathos about the clerk's life that comes out very well in the "Babu English" employed. There is another poem titled "Touching" which

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could be dismissed as one of his trite pieces, but "triteness" especially as a casual conversation trait is deliberately adapted in tone and attitude to keep a sentimental subject, on an unsentimental keel. The poem plays around with a range of meanings for "Touching" from the sentimental to the spiritual and ultimately to the deliberate banality of :

Some are easily touched Some are hard to touch Some are hard to touch You are often touched I am often touched.



Ezekiel's awareness of different language registers and his ability to adapt his own poetic skills to each situation is indeed a reader's delight. Ezekiel as his poetry and non-poetic writings reveal is highly conscious of his poetic vocation, language is his forte, yet in "Minority Poem" (p. 236) , he is quite unsparing on himself and his cherished role of a poet . Compared to the earlier poems written in a lighter vein, this has a sombre mood, and it gives an added dimension to the contextuality of language that he himself is so conscious about. The only difference is that unlike the earlier instances, with their dramatised personae, where limitations in linguistic ability brought out limitations of other personal traits as well, here it is his own self brought in the ambit of his critical disapproval. The "invisible guests" whose presence the poet cojures up in his room, while he talks "do not argue" wait for him to finish and then leave off "with inscutable faces". Left alone he reflects, "It's the language really / separates whatever else is shared ". Language then is an attitude of mind

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, that grows out of cultural conditioning and the poet then with his Jewish background is somewhat of an outsider . In addition to it his own role of a poet is a limited one , it leaves the guests cold in a crisis of mass-hysteria. Therefore the lonely regretful tone of the lines:

> And you, uneasy Orphan of their racial Memories ,merely Polish up your alien techniques of observation while the city burns.

If Ezekiel presents a whole range of Indian English usages in "Very Indian Poems", Keki N. Daruwalla makes a forthright pronouncement of his love for, and dependence on Indian English. His attitude towards Indian English is a little at variance from that of Ezekiel's, who was often the amused observer of its clumsy handling. Daruwalla finds himself implicated in the gaucheries of Indian English, unlike Ezekiel's distanced mocking tone, he brings out the characteristics of this local brand English in the rather personalised tone of " My Mistress".

The Mistress is admittedly not a pure bred, a half caste of low origins :

On the geneological tree somewhere is a Muslim midwife and a Goan cook But she is more mixed than that Down the genetic lane, babus and Professors of English have also made their one nightcontributions.

(The Keeper Of The Dead, 1982)¹⁸

She is an upstart alright, but her latest slang is available in "classical dictionaries". Her speech is such that her "consonants bludgeon you". The description goes on to reveal more embarrassing secrets :

In the mornings her mouth is sour With dreams that had fermented during the night When I sleep by her side I can almost hear the blister-bubble grope for a mouth through which to snarl.

(p. 22)

If these lines talk of her untidy expressive formulations, the poet owns up to his own creative struggle with her in the sexual imagery of the following lines :

> My love for her survives from night to night even though each time I have to wrestle with her in bed.

The poet's love for her endures, inspite of all her unsavoury aspects. He is well aware of her dubious reputation :

In the streets she is known They hiss when she passes.

Wanton and vain with a baggage of tinsel "wears heels even though her feet / are smeared up to the ankles with henna ". Unabashed about her incongruous appearance and indigenous habits she is pretentious enough to ape foreign fashions and fare. All this is more than enough to make the poet self conscious about his love and dependence on her but then he has no choice as he owns her up "She is Indian English, the language that I use ". (p.23)

The poem built up through sustained personification combined with a self implicating irony , gives a succinct poetic version of the sociolinguistic history of English in India. It is not a very flattering view but in its modesty and good humour , it does give Indian English its due recognition and incorporates all the brands of Indian English , what Braj Kachru lists as the "cline of Englishes in India ranging from educated Indian English to varities such as *Babu English*, *Butler English*, *Bearer English and Kitchen English"* . ¹⁹ Not just this single poem but Daruwalla's entire corpus reveals his awareness of language shifts in response to environment. Instead of being apologetic about his Indianised expression , he infact makes a conscious effort towards the indegenisation of English in his poems.

Daruwalla extends English language to a varied range of subjects and situations, he has infact given the most extensive coverage to the Indian Panorama and in doing so adapted English to singular indigenous contexts, "touched it with colours typically Indian" (P. Lal's questionnaire, p. 94). His style is basically narrative and descriptive ; a mode suited to the long poem yet the moment of engagement within the poem is often dramatic. His expression which is clear sharp and chisseled reinforces the dramatic quality of the poems and has been his hallmark ever since the

first volume Under Orion (1970) ; it remains so upto the Winter Poems (1980) . There is also the discursive and reflective voice that has a mellowed quality and is more noticeable in Landscapes (1987) and occasionally in Crossing Of Rivers (1976) and The Keeper Of The Dead (1982). Daruwalla's observations whether on the broad plane of sociopolitical reality or limited to an individualized context are hard hitting and exact. This incisiveness is as much an attribute of insight as of language. "Curfew In A Riot Torn City" the first poem in the volume Under Orion brings out the inadequacy of the police in a crisis of mass histeria. The whole course of protracted vigil and surreptious mischief is brought out in packed images as in the opening lines, "Blood and fog / are over half the town / and curfew stamps along the empty street " (Under Orion pp. 13-15)²⁰. But there is a looseness in the structure of the poem and certain lines like " for they are the sick tribe and if they loose their heads / others will loose theirs ", or the concluding, " What the hell is it, you wonder / curfew or contagion? ", are quite ineffective. However the poem titled " Curfew 2" in the *Winter Poems* completes the picture by highlighting the intimidating aspect, "The stress is on silence. A man may die / but the body shouldn't thud " (*Winter Poems*, pp. 41-42).²¹ This poem written in regular three line stanzas maintains the taut structure required by the subject. Returning to the first volume, one finds a sustained narrative structure in many of the subsequent poems, as well as the apt modulation of the language to the situation . " Pestilence " comes across as a very effective poem that conveys the haunting fear associated with the epidemic . The opening lines "Pairs of padded feet / are behind me / astride me " and the concluding " only the string bed is exchanged / for a plank" are well in accordance , in between the added dimension back in time of entire villages depopulated is brought forth in the image :

But memory like a crane arm, unloads its ploughed-up rubble ancient visitations is what one recalls the sweep of black feet towards the ghats

(Under Orion pp.16-17).

Daruwalla's achievement is in tackling the broadly visible issues of socio - political malaise, yet maintaining the precarious balance of poetic communication. With such subjects there is always the danger of either too much protest or the poem descending to the mere journalese. He , may be at times guilty of the former excess but rarely of the latter fault. It is not only in the wider context of social protest or social relevance that Daruwalla's language acquires the edge of immediacy, even with isolated, individualized situations, his language shapes itself into exact metaphors corresponding to the psychological dimension explored. For instance in the "Ledge Walker" the moments leading up to the final leap are given an unusual imagery " She stalks the ledge / intense and feline / she is stalking herself (Under Orion p. 40). The compact poem is very successful at conveying the claustrophobia, the hallucinatory state of mind as well as feelings of alienation, withdrawal and disintegration that mark the final moments that lead the suicide. up to

"Dialogues with a Third Voice ", a sequence in six parts is essentially a repudiation of the poetic conventions and icons of yesteryears. In its rhetoric of irony and deliberate bathos it seeks to make an independent beginning way below the rarified olympian heights of "Myth Talk", "Poetry Talk" and "Tragedy Talk". As in this case where the title takes off from Eliot's essay "Three Voices Of Poetry"²² there are deliberate echoes in some other poems as well, for example in "Death By Burial" (Under Orion) and "Rhapsody on a Hungry Night" (Winter Poems). While in their content and treatment Daruwalla's poems are starkly dissimilar from Eliot's, the obvious reference to the master is used as another point of departure from a studied tradition, it cannot be the received tradition for a poet functioning in a totally different world. Daruwalla is only too conscious that his is the world of the Indian English Poet and he has to recoin his expression for it to have value that is current and not just fossilized.

If echoes from Eliot were employed to heighten the contextual dissimilarity, 'Code Switching "²³ is resorted to in the title itself of poems like "Har Nag " (*Crossing of Rivers*) and "Aag Matam " (*The Keeper of the Dead*), to give another plane of contextuality. The associations that the word "Nag " has in Hindi or rather the Hindu cultural context are lost in translating and the poet doesn't even attempt it, while for "Aag Matam " - the fire mourning - is provided in parenthesis. The inventory of hallowed names in the Indian cultural traditions is a long one and the use of these names is quite unavoidablefor a poet who builds his poems with

reference to the land , its socio- cultural life and traditions. The names of rivers Ganga, Ghagra, even in ordinary usage are richly evocative , more so are the specialised usages like name of God "Shiva", mythological character "Pandava", name for month "Shravan" local name of trees "Parijat" , "Cemul", "Chinar" etc. Apart from these local names that Daruwalla liberally uses with their rich allusiveness , he also takes the benefit of stylized literary expressions . This is successfully done in the poem titled " The Round of the Seasons " (*Landscapes* , pp. 35-40)²⁴ where words not just from chaste Hindi like, " Grishma " and " Sharad " etc. are used for a distinct tone , but the whole pattern is based on an extended working of "Shringar Rasa " .

Moving on to Jayanta Mahapatra , one sees a very different poetic strategy at work - in fact one that seems also to be the most baffling., For him English is the medium to express a very personalised way of feeling, a distinct sensibility rooted in the cultural ambience of Orissa . Without resorting to Indianisms or Code Switching he moulds language so completely to the thought process that not only the logical grammatical structure but also the figurative conventions are forced into new configurations . Thereby he extends the expressibility of the medium , yet very often communicates at a level that is beyond language . For instance in the poem " The Earth Of July " the silent stillness of the evening is exploited to the fullest measure, it holds the clue to a multi-layered consciousness of time , "keeping silence / a stone celebrates with its wreaths of faith / in the ages underneath it " (*Waiting* , p. 7.).

subsequent images of the "iron plough" tearing through the "earth of July" and the evening star's " return to the ritual sky / and an evening of centuries " extend the consciousness back in time in a manner that is evocative yet amenable to the categories of linguistic unit.

However there are many other poems that resist the conventional logic of comprehension and *Relationship* (1980) which is considered to be a significant achievement not only in Mahapatra's oeurve but also of Indian English Poetry can be taken as an illustration of this difficulty. The first section opens with reference to a point in time that takes you back to "the forbidding myth / the phallus of the enormous stone". It is a time when:

the lengthened shadow of a restless vulture caresses the strong and silent deodars in the valley, and when the time of the butterfly moves inside the the fierce body of the forest bear and feel the tensed muscles of rock yield to the virtuous water of the hidden springs Of the Mahanadi.

(Relationship | Selected poems p.38)²⁶

As in the poem "Earth Of July "there is here an extension back in time to the subconscious layers of memory, but it is done at a more intuitive level. As an approximation to a simpler plane of meaning it can be said that these images build up attributes of the particular moment aghainst the backdrop of the larger dimension of time. There is a wistfulness, a restlessness, a fleeting ephemeral quality about the

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moment that breaks through the resistance of collective amnesia, to flow back in time. As one gathers these snippets of meaning the images shift to another plane of memory, that of artisans and the countless lives sacrificed or slaughtered, the blackness of death, " the infinite distance / inside our watery skulls ". This submerged reality of death is also part of the great myth, as are " the sailing ships of those maritime ancestors / who have vanished in the black bay without a trace (*selected poems*, p. 39). The poem moves with a rapid momentum towards the final section, where the terms of the communion it has established through the myth of the temple, are more explicit. However, there are as well as in the intermediate sections the problems of comprehension remain in substantial measure. For example, section IV opens to the resonance of :

> > (Selected poems, p. 43)

For all their appeal the lines remain baffling, are they an invocation to the land, the temple, or to the myth ? Is it a loved presence that remains always distant in time, felt only through the icons of the temple and the stirrings of the sky and the land. Even in the closing stanza , the multi-layered density of associations communicates itself in powerfully evocative and inseparable images. At the level of interpretative words we have abstractions like beauty, time ,space , pain but they are quite futile and meaningless here given the intensity of the poet's final consecration amidst the litter of "picnic-paper and empty bottles" on the beach, and I quote at length :

> I want to finish my prayer that began like a thin rustling in a mango tree a prayer to draw my body out of a thousand years and reflect the earth's lost amplitudes, the bridal footprints of fantastic peacocks dancing in the rain and the warm palms of gathering dusk . Where crimson heartlines float longingly in the unknown sunlight of the earth, like soft cirrus crossing space above, and my dark heart twists with a feather of your unheard moan weary with an echo of your goodbye of tasteless ash

> > (Selected Poems, p. 44)

The kind of associative process that is at work here can be explained in terms of M.K.Naik's analysis of Mahapatra's surrealistic imagery. He writes , "Surrealist art works by free association of ideas resulting in strange juxtapositions , abrupt transitions and a curious amalgamation and interpenetration of images , with a view to achieving what Denise Levertov calls 'a constellation of perceptions".²⁷ G.N.Devy

approaches the problems posed by Mahapatra's language in terms of "two radically different styles of of writing" he classifies them as "narrative He further clarifies " one and speculative, or modernistic and romantic". is clear ,ironic and imagistic . The other is intense , involved and symbolic . Often his poems combine these two styles . And it is because of such a combination of the antithetical styles that his poems become the critics' despair".²⁸ Thse approaches with their extended critical lexical are an instance of the challenge posed by Mahapatra's poetry. However the challenge proves to be quite rewarding because in his successfully integrated poems, he has given a new dimension to Indian English Poetry which otherwise to quote Devy aghain "would have remained confined to a predicatable modernistic mode"²⁹. We have in Mahapatra, a poet who for whatever the influences that he imbibes, Western or Indian comes up with a voice that is singularly individualistic and who puts the reader (especially Indian) in communion with a time that is not lost but only embedded in memory.

As we turn to the poetry of Agha Shahid Ali, Sudeep Sen and Sujata Bhatt, we come to a phase of Indian English Writing that can be characterized as the upbeat eighties and post-eighties phenomenon. The eighties have been a decade of prolific high quality writing being published by both the established well known writers / poets like G.V.Desani, Raja Rao, R.K.Narayan, Anita Desai, Bharati Mukherjee, Ezekiel, Daruwalla , Mahapatra, A.K.Ramanujan and the newer ones like Amitav Ghosh and Vikram Seth among others. Salman Rushdie's epoch making *Midnight's* Children (1981), followed by Shame (1983) gave an increased international recogniton to contemporary Indian English Writing . While on the one hand it acquired a collective recognition in being regarded as a siginificant presence on the international scene especially in the context of post-colonialism ; on the other hand the indubitable merit of a writer like Rushdie, in whose work displacement is the motif for the narrative structure and linguistic range, reframed the parameters of a writer's national identity in terms of a trans-national consciousness. I examine the work of Agha Shahid Ali, Sudeep Sen and Sujata Bhatt in the context of this newly acquired freedom from the psychological restraints of a nationalisitic commitment and also a relative freedom from the anxiety of proving their poetic and linguisitic credentials in terms of second language writing. There is a greater confidence and ease with language in their work, however this fluidity is not very often different from a state of flux in their writing. They are more preoccupied with language, as it is through this medium that they are able to explore and define their selfhood in a multicultural context . For instance Agha Shahid Ali's second collection of poems The Beloved Witness (1992), draws it title from a collocation of the two different meanings of his middle name "Shahid" in Persiagn and Arabic respectivly. The last couplet of the "Ghazal" says :

They ask me to tell them what " Shahid" means -

Listen : it means " The Beloved " in Persian, "Witness " in Arabic . (*The Beloved Witnèss*, pp. 71-72)³⁰ Reversing the chronological order of their publication, I treat this second volume of his poems first, before moving on to *The Half Inch Himalayas* (1987). In *The Beloved Witness* preoccupation with language takes on a trans-national context, while the former volume has more of the stylistic features of his Urdu heritage.

For an Indian emigrant to America, poetic language becomes a medium of bridging the cultural gap , however in the poem " Dear Editor ", the scepticism of the editor towards him who is hesitant in calling him a poet, forces him to advertise his other wares:

I am a dealer in words that mix cultures and leave me rootless this is an excellent trade recently I sold liquid words wet in perfume bottles and words of dust in paper boxes dried in the sun to feed a season

(From Bone Sculpture in The Beloved Witness, p.4)

This ironical stance is carried on further in the follow up of "The Editor Revisited ", in the persistent note of "You still haven't called me a poet, dear Sir". He has realized that rootlessness is the right vantage point for inter - culture purveying:

I began with a laugh, stirred my tea with English

drank India down with a faint British accent temples beggars and dust spread like marmalade on my toast

(from In Memory of Begum Akhtar in The Beloved Witness, p.20.)

Inspite of having mastered the art of giving the right Indian dressing in his poems , that caters to the stereotyped Western expectations , the "rejection slips " that he collects from the "esteemed journal " leave him out in the cold. He is out of place in Delhi too, becausae he writes in English and the vociferous protests of the nativists "A language must measure upto one's native dust", give him only a marginal presence there. His predicament is not very different from that of the comparatively older poets like Ezekiel , Daruwalla and Mahapatra, who had to be a little defensive about the choice of their medium , in his case however there is the added dimension of rootlessness . Along with the ironic mocking tone there is also the self consciousness about his rootless status in these poems . His identity colours the use of his language , not just in terms of the the background that he brings to it but also in terms of the perceptions of others about him and his own self conscious reaction to them .

In the poem "Language Games " from A Walk Through The Yellow Pages there is no refuge in words as neither consonants nor vowels help him out, given the very real constraints, he extends his poetic vocabulary by drawing from a multi - cultural heritage. His is a richly cultivated sensibility that has blended the influences of Western Literature and the Eastern heritage of Urdu, Arabic culture to develop a markedly unique

style. While the language of many of his poems is the crisp spoken idiom of American English , for instance in *A Walk Through Yellow Pages*, elsewhere there is a graceful tone that fits in well with the recurrent theme of nostalgia in his work . Infact this is the one word that holds the clue to the special aura about most of his poems, and his language accomplishes the rare feat of communicating the sense of loss and wistfulness. This is done in an overt manner in the couplets of "Gazal " where the opening one states :

The only language of loss left in the world is Arabic

These words were said to me in a language, not Arabic

(From "Nostalgists Map Of America" in The Beloved Witness, p.7)

The independent couplets give him the freedom to go back in time to the prophecies of Koran and the Judaic context of Ishmael and Abraham as well as to weave in literary allusions from the fate of Majnoon and Laila and also to pay tributes to the achievement of Mahmoud Darwish and Lorca. The refrain of the second line ending keeps him "greatfully shakled "³¹ to use his own phrase from the preface to his translations of Faiz Ahmed Faiz, titled *The Rebel's Silhouette*. In the poem "From another Desert " the poet in his rootless existence in America identifies with the unavailing search of the protagonist Majnoon for his beloved as well as with the bewilderment of Ishmael. The turn of phrase is very close to his translations of Faiz, especially "the last line that refers to the last hour". "Tell her to speak when the hour comes / simply of the sky; friend speak of the sky / when the hour comes, speak simply of the air". (from Nostalgists Map of America in *The Beloved Witness*, p.64)

The "Swordman ", the "Beloved " are archetypal images in Urdu poetry, Agha Shahid Ali has his own graceful phrases associated especially with the breeze, another recurrent motif in urdu poetry. For example 'Some went back, folding breezes / in their wallets " (From another Desert, *The Beloved Witness* p.61) and the last three lines of the poem "Dacca Gauzes" where the larger dimension of history is unobtrusively woven along with grand mother's personal memories :

> One morning , she says , the air was dew-starched , she pulled it absently through her ring.

> > (From TheHalf Inch Himalayas, p.16)

As one turns to *The Half Inch Himalayas*, the influences are recognizable at a more informal level , they come across as the natural expressions of a personality that has imbibed these strains and echoes as part of daily lived experience . For instance here "Urdu" the refined medium " is handled deftly by a Butcher outside Jama Masjid , " the language polished smooth by knives" (*Half Inch Himalayas* pp.22-23) , as he exchanges couplets of Ghalib and Mir with his customers in the routine commerce of buying and selling . At another level the poet's response to the strains of Hindustani Classical music - the Ghazal the Thumri, as to the excellence of Begum Akhtar , Siddheswari Devi, and Rasoolan Bai is conveyed to the reader through the modulation of the language in "The

season of the plains". The mother's wistful comment " the monsoons never cross / the mountains into Kashmir " (*Half Inch Himalayas* pp. 17-19), makes the music of the renowned singers come alive on the page.

Sudeep Sen's first collection of poems "*The Lunar Visitations* " was published in 1990, followed by *Kali in Ottawa Rima* (1992) and *New York Times* (1993). In the first volume as the title indicates, moon is an actual presence and is exploited to the full for the visual effect woven in words, as well as for the semantic interplay. The poems varying in modes, narrative, reflective, mythic, surrealistic, have deliberately been written in a simple manner as if to leave enough space for the workings of the moon. It is in the delightful poem "A Child's Fable " that he pays tribute to the pliant sympathy of the moon to all shades of human experience:

> Hidden fully or partially , half , quarter , or the propitious full ' diffused, patched , edged or etched myraid myths allusions. The moon , surface like a trampoline , six times more pliable bouncing rhythm of human experience

("A Childhood Dream", July 20,1969) ³⁵

While its sympathy remains at the level of a child's fable in the poem "The Moon Elves" it adds to the solemn atmosphere in "Remembering Hiroshima Tonight". In another poem, based on Indian mythology, it heightens the aura of the mysterious "Triple Moon Of The Trident" and the private saga of the lovers in "The lovers and the Moon" is subsumed in the growing ambience of moonlight, " they knew they weren't alone / a large myth was looming all around." (Lunar Visitations p.37).

As with the suffused atmosphere of "*The Lunar Visitations*", Sen achieves a lot of deliberate effects elsewhere too. The world of the two cultures that he inhabits provides its own rationale of linguistic juxtaposition as is done in the titles of the two poems "Kali in Ottovarima" and "Villanelle For Shiva". Apart from these startling statements he also draws full mileage out of the heavyweight words of the Hindu lexical like "Chandipaat", "Pratima ", "Ashoor" as from the enumeration of names of Durga's children - "Saraswati, Lakshmi, Ganesh and Kartik" in "Durga Puja ". This very successful poem closes on the note of the incantations in Bengali :

"Akhone aami aashi "... that I'll return once again ..Sasthi, Saptami Ashtami, Nobami, Dashmi...Sashti, Saptami, Ashtami , Nobomi, Dashmi

(From Kali In Ottavarima)³⁴

In *New York Times* he attempts to build the diverse aspects of the city from personal, even surrealistic vignettes. At times walking back home in the early hours of morning, he is a lone presence on the deserted pavements, apart from an old straggler or two. At other times in a crowd of people the realization flashes that :

From the first babbles of a new born lisping To the ashed annihilation of the last skeleton , mnemonically , life proceeds , pulsing letter by letter , word by word , passing the baton beat after beat , through stuttered phrases to polished facility of language ,and finally to the silence of inevitability. (*Sexless like Alphabets, from New York Times* ,*p*.29) ³⁵

Given the common humanity, "all of us, huddled together in chronological acts / classrooms of meaning, learned and unlearned facts ", are quite innocuous and sexless like alphabets. Recording a more hurried pace of life the title poem of the volume "New York Times", brings the daily momentum of the rushed morning schedule to the underground rail - roads, and uses the subway as a metaphor for the strained subconscious, " the underground rattles with the passing of every train. / After all how long can one stretch time ? " (N.T., pp 19-20).

All the poems are not equally successful, some even have a contrived effect, but at his best Sen succeeds in integrating his metaphors well, whether Indian or foreign.

Poetic language for Sujata Bhatt becomes a medium of sorting out her rich and varied experience across three continents. Her poems are characetrized by a rare ease and spontaniety which is all the more striking given the complex interweaving of her memories. Her Indian Childhood is seen in the perspective of subsequent experience, often the reverse is also true. There is an easy confluence of associations from America, Eurpoe and India in the pages of her two volumes, *Brunizem* (1988) and *Monkey Shadows* (1991).³⁶ Inspite of a multilingual proficiency she confesses to an unusual inhibition in the poem " Search For My Tongue " . Switching over to Gujarati as well as the inclusion of the Gujarati script , in the texture of the poem , which is a radical experiment that she brings in to Indian English poetry , does not help her out of the impasse . Arrested speech is linked to the metaphors of the arrested flow of water in a river , as it dries up , " I know it can't be here / in this dry river bed . / my tongue can only be / where there is water " (*Brunizem* , p. 64)³⁷. This scarcity of water brings the memory of the little girl " who carried a black clay pitcher on her head , / who sold water at the train station ", but it is difficult to think of her in English . In the second section of the poem , Bhatt explains at length this handicap of multilingualism :

You ask me What I mean by saying I have lost my tongue . I ask you what would you do if you had two tongues in your mouth , and lost the first one , the mother tongue , and could not really know the other , the foreign one . (*Brunizen* , p.65)

Knowing that the two cannot be spoken together , the mother tongue rots in the mouth , as the compulsion of place bring the foreign one in use . However it is the shape of overnight dreams that give back the vigour to the mother tongue , it lives on in memories where associations of place can never be substituted :

> And yet, the humid June air, the stormiest sky in Connecticut

can never be

(*aakash*) (p.67)

In another poem " The Undertow ", in a more integrated perspective she shares with her German husband, she writes :

"There are at least three

languages between us .

And the common space, the common dream - sound is far out at sea . (*Brunizem*, pp. 89 -90)

In the subconscious space, " the three languages are there swimming like seals fat with fish and sun / they smile, / understand each other so well ", standing on the shore the couple can take only one word at a time in its cognate forms, the waves " flooding the streets " make words spill over rapidly " through the book-stores ", and the overwhelming recognition of common sounds, fill their " shoes " and " love with salt ."

" A different Histroy " in a very deft manner brings in the politics of language only to abandon it equally gently before the concluding line . The poem goes on to give a random list of the sacred status of almost any and everything in India , after the matter of fact pronouncement :

> Great Pan is not dead he simply emigrated to India Here the gods roam freely disquised as snakes or monkeys ;

> > ("A Different History", Brunizem pp. 37)

The second stage stanza suddenly springs the question "Which language / has not been the oppressor's tongue ? " For those who regard English Language as the instrument of colonial rule, here is a subtle reminder for introspection, the shaping of the Indian languages by the upper castes who could endlessly invest the entire phenomenal world with the presence of gods gives a wider perspective to the politics of language than just the context of colonial and neo-colonial domination . Her achievement is in keeping the poetic balance and in not allowing politics to take over her poem. This is the distinct quality of her tone, there is no anger, no bitterness and it is not that the uncomfortable questions are not asked. Irony is used sparingly, even when potentially volatile issues are handled, For instance the feminist angle in many of the poems is not just glossed over, it is presented in a sympathetic intelligent manner totally free from a distracting vehemence. The poem "Buffaloes " (p.13) interwines gently the repressed desires of the young widow and the social dik'tat that has been merciful enough in allowing her this listless life, without allowing them to intrude into the routine chore of the farmer's son who bring his buffaloes to the pond for the daily bath.

Bhatt's forte is the structural control that she maintains in her poems, this allows her to raise difficult questions, without recourse to angry denunciations or ironic pithiness. her voice always remains that of a personal involvement; whether it is the obfuscated world of myth, or the course of past and contemporary history. *Monkey* Shadows (1991), her second volume, is also remarkable for the twin qualities of spontaneous flow and unobtrusive control, as she weaves her way in and out of memories especially in the section *The Way to Maninagar*. The multicultural areas of her experience are contiguous only in her memory and her personal associations . Language shifts , transferrences that normally take place with reference to physically contiguous areas , in her case , become a personal juxtaposition of associations as in the poem " A Different way to Dance " (pp. 33 - 36) .These personal associations are shown to acquire at times a baffling transcultural dimension as in the poem "Devibhen Pathak " . The swastika which is a sacred symbol to the Hindu mind is something very different to an inhabitant of post - Nazi Germany . Bhatt frames her own dilemma into the shape of a question for the future , that her German born daughter shall occupy :

What will you say ? What colours will you prefer ? In what language will you speak ? (pp. 46 -51) ³⁸

As we move form to Ezekiel to Bhatt, there emerges even in this limited selection of poets, a distinct pattern of acculturation in the use of English language. Not only is there a growing ease and confidence, as the questions of correctness become redundant, but the poets are also actively engaged in extending the range of poetic expressions available in Indian English. While the problem of " cultural lags " continues to be there, the resilience displayed by the Poets has to be acknowledged . Ezekiel's adaptability to both meter and free verse forms, Daruwalla's strong jagged, uneven long lines, and Mahapatra's new syntagmatic and paradigmatic arrangements, communicate powerfully and adequately. With the younger generation bringing in a trans-national consciousness, we have diverse experiments and strategies employed to cope with a radical shift in cultural codes. In this context language games become a playful juxtaposition of the poet's self-identity against the larger dimension of a new culture. At this point the two aspects of the poet's identity also intermingle, one is that of his status as an individual poet, the other a someewhat politically coloured perception of his being of Indian origin .This is not just in terms of the attitudes of others, but also in terms of his own self - consciousness and psychological mooring.

There are other issues also that have emerged out of the chapter . One is the transcendence of the ironic mode as seen in Sujata Bhatt for instance , this becomes a siginificant achievement , given not only the influence of American New Critics , but also the compulsion of what Prof. Perry calls "Self - Reflexive irony " ³⁹ in the modern world . Whether it remains an individual breakthrough or a new beginning remains to be seen . The second issue is that of the unshackling of the colonial mentality , given the charge that English perpetuates this domination . The viablility of this viewpoint needs to be examined in the wider context of the poets socio - cultural engagement with their milieu . This will be taken in the next chapter .

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THE SOCIO - CULTURAL LANDSCAPE

Indian English poetry is a by-product of Westernization, its origins lie undeniably in our colonial past. Its popular acceptance is narrower than that of the language in which it is written, to many it remains twice removed from the Indian socio cultural reality in terms of both medium and content. Its relationship with the Indian culture is often seen as superficial ,, the stand of the individual poets alienated and on the whole, the entire enterprise of the poets a perpetuation of colonial domination. S.K.Desai feels that the Indian English poets basically take on a reductive stance visa-vis social milieu. He writes, " they have nothing positive to offer except the possibility of cultivating their kind of neutral detached and existentialist consciousness".

The focus of this chapter is to examine the Indian English poet's relationship to his society and culture. While the multifaceted pluralistic character of Indian society is accepted beyond arguments, the Indian English poet's place in it is still considered uncertain, often outside of it. He is admittedly urban, middle class, and even westernized to a certain extent, at times also alienated - but for all these characteristics , very much a part of India's composite multiculturality. Alienation at no point in this context means severance of ties, and alienation is only one stance of the Indian English Poet, albeit an overemphasised one. Involvement is

another one in the context of modern sensibility ,and that too at a deep intuitive level. These contradictions are a part of the mixed response of the Indian English poet towards his Indian backdrop.

India is an ancient civilisation with a strong continuity in cultural traditions, they are often a source of enrichment, but more often a source of bafflement and frustration for the poet whose approach is one of critical enquiry. This mixed attitude is very pronounced in the poetry of N. Ezekiel, K.N.Daruwalla and Jayanta Mahapatra. In this ancient land the modern poet realizes that the people and their myths have had a strange comingled existence. It is difficult to distinguish between superstition and enduring faith. There is a touching patience and endurance in the people - but also the most frustrating passivity. The irrational, the devious, the corrupt, the ugly, all are embraced under the haze of a pristine glory - even the poverty.

These perceptions are a part of the daily experience of the poet; angst in the Naipaulesque sense - is one of the expressions of the poet, however unlike Naipaul's dark indictment of the Indian Civilisation . The poets studied here have been successful at balancing their negative comments with a positive personal involvement . This personal stake makes their criticism more candid and their poetry more substantial.

An ambivalent tone and an ironic attitude are two of the more common linguistic strategies employed by the poet to express the duality of his response to his heritage and environment. Given the challenge of encompassing the diversity of his environment and the complexity of his own attitude towards it, the poet tends to turn towards the structure of myth.The creative reworking of recieved myths gives him great flexibility in negotiating the tensions of tradition and modernity. Daruwalla, Mahapatra, Aga Shahid Ali, Sudeep Sen and Sujata Bhatt, all make use of this mode. Many a time the poet is able to integrate a personal dimension with the larger myth. This is often done in relation to the poet's own background, his attitudes towards patriarchy, the institution of family, the process and consciousness of growing up or a journey back in time with memories. Mahapatra , Aga Shahid Ali , and Sujata Bhatt achieve remarkable results with such an integration , as does Daruwalla at times. Apart from the reconstruction of a recieved myth the poet tends to mythicise the present as he attempts to incorporate the contradictions of his present situation as well as of the past that he appropriates to himself. It is with reference to these shared perceptions that I attempt to study each of the six poets.

Nissim Ezekiel makes the post independent modernist shift in Indian English Poetry in terms of both content and style. He set a different agenda for poetry with his focus mainly on the city; the urban conglomeration of Bombay. Its presence looms large in many of his poems that belong to *The Unfinished Man* (1960) and the subsequent volumes.

His focus is confined not just to the middle class and the more privileged segment of Bombay's population, but rather the total picture of the overcrowded city, with poverty and struggle writ large on its pavements, comes within its ambit. What confronts the eye is pavements, comes within its ambit. What confronts the eye is unappealing enough; the clamorous maze of people in their daily traffic, the fight for survival, the loss of identity, the loss of purpose, are some aspects of the disorienting total picture that the poet presents. This picture of the cacophonous melagne is well recorded in the line's (4)

Barbaric city sick with slums

Its hawkers,beggars,iron lunged, Processions led by frantic drums, A million purgatorial lanes, And child like masses , many tongued, Whose wages are in words and crumbs.

(A Morning Walk, pp119-20)²

Ezekiel describes the city in a starkly realistic manner, and neither does he harbour any illusions regarding his own status in the city. With his intellectual pursuits he has managed to earn a small public recognition, but as he assesses himself for a self profile - the words are precise in their reductive impact;

> The city walks where fame is cheap, And he belongs an active fool. (p.120)

In another poem "In India " that belongs to *The Exact Name* (1965) there is a very controlled use of irony which allows the inter-play of multiple perceptions that offset each other in its four sections.

The strange medley of human, the sub human, and the super human in the midst of squalor and confusion is all too glaringly exposed under the sun:

> Always in the Sun's eye Here among the beggars Hawkers pavement sleepers , Hutment dwellers, slums, Dead souls of men and God Burnt out mothers, frightened Virgins wasted child And tortured animal All in mocking silence Suffering the place and time ride my Elephant of thoughts A C'ezane slung around my neck.

(p. 131)

The tone is a little too lacerating but saved by the ironic self consciousness of the last two lines - the portly but effete "elephant of thought ".

In section II of the poem the focus shifts to a convergence of the multi religious and racial minorities of India:

The Anglo-Indian gentleman Drank whisky in some Jewish den With Muslims slowly creeping in Before or after prayers.

(p.132)

Section III of the poem takes a sojourn to the more genteel atmosphere of Western social norms, where the visiting India gentleman also manage to conduct themselves in accordance, but for their wooden wives who somehow "corrupt the atmosphere".

Section IV further develops this picture of the right ambience of foreign circles but this time, the focus being on the elegant Indian lady employee, who is socially very much at ease in the large apartment belonging to her English boss;

> With cold beer and Western music, Lucid talk of art and literature And all the changes India needs.

> > (p.133)

However all this elegance does not lead to much - except the lending of a safety pin to the lady, " before she took the elevator down " in her slightly dishevelled state.

The impressions gathered on these foreign shores present an alternative to the Indian backwardness with its poverty and orthodoxy. However the alternative is no more satisfactory than the native scene . It is with this realization that in the poem "Background Casualty" from *Hymns In Darkness* (1976), that the poet states his committed resolve;

I have made my commitments now This is one : to stay where I am As others choose to give themselves In some remote and backward place My backward place is where I am

(p. 181)

As the title indicates this is a poem of introspection , where the poet is the protagonist amidst the scenes of his childhood , youth and

adulthood. The different sites associated with each phase are integrated in the chronology of personal history. Belonging as he does to a racial minority community which has roots going back in India only to a few generations, his stand point of observation is often what is referred to as the sensitive liminal space. From this stand point he is acutely conscious of the tensions of his dual response towards the Indian landscape which on the one hand, he say, " sears my eyes ", but on the other there is also the emphatic need to belong to a place which reconciles him to the backwardness. In his essay, " Naipaul's India And Mine " he writes , " I am not a Hindu and my background makes me a natural outsider. Circumstances and decisions relate me to India . In other countries I am a foreigner, in India I am an Indian "³. The first section of the poem records the acute self consciousnessof the frail jewish boy growing up in , " terror of the strong / But undernourished Hindu lads ". even in the Roman Catholic School he was the odd exception :

A mugging jew among the wolves

They told me I had killed the Christ

That year I won the scripture prize,

A Muslim sportsman boxed my ears. (p.179)

The last line highlights the lonely, vulnerable predicament, of his growing years. However subsequently a little more self assured, at twenty two, it was time to go abroad. There " Philosophy, Poverty and Poetry, three / Companions shared my Basement room. " However even in the " London Season " a sense of failure dogged him, " In every thing a

bitter thought ". So on his return to India, the point was " how to fel at home ". In a Hindu majority cultuire this was no easy task, resigning himself to the situation he carried on , " I prepared for the worst. Married / Changed jobs, and saw myself a fool ".

Ezekiel's Jewish background did become a point of difference to the extent that he could not attune himself to the deeper layers of the Indian psyche. In "Naipaul's India and Mine " he writes, Not being a Hindu I cannot identify myself with India's past as a comprehensive heritage or reject it ;; as if it were mine to reject. I can identify myself only with modern India." ⁴ This statement not only explains Ezekiel's choice of the city as the locale of his poetry, but it also explains the reason for his concentration on its contemporaniety. His poems do not reach back in time to any collective memory , Prof. Bijay Kumar Das, comments on this aspect , " Ezekiel's Bombay is located in the present and it lacks the historical dimension. " ⁵. This should however not be construed as a negative point, for in his sincerity, Ezekiel does not over-reach himself to encompass what he is not familiar with. This is rather a measure of his authentic involvement with the Indian environment.

The presence of the rural milieu is almost negligible in Ezekiel's poetry, again for the simple reason that it is not the region of his lived experience. A poem like "Rural Suite " for instance is a critical rationalist's indignation at the duplicity of the summer season " bhikshuks " (p.196-98) who play on the simple credulity of the village folk. There is no deep involvement on the part of the poet with the scene and as the title

indicates , the indignation is very much that of a visitor from the city, nothing more than that. Likewise in the poem "The truth about the floods" the narrator is a reporter from the city whose task is simply to " give the correct report" (pp.185-88). These poems comment on the sad situation and mentality of the people concerned, observed from a critical distance . In the latter instance , the criticism is directed towards the lax administration . However " Night Of The Scorpion " (pp 130-31) is a remarkably successful poem and this is on acount of the totality of its perception . Without any specific localizing , the poet succeeds at conveying the entire dramatic content of the situation , as well as its social ethos. The mother's words of relief at the end of the ordeal " Thank God , the scorpion picked on me / and spared my children" come across as a simple after word to the high drama.

Apart from the incidental peices that acquire their ambience from a slightly removed ground , the majority of poems that directly comment on the social milieu, are located within the confines of the city. Most of them depict middle - class values , however there are some pieces , like "Bellasis Road" (pp.188-89) or "Ganga" (p.202) which take a closer look at the city's seamy underside. However the poems that are more successful at communicating the ethos of the city belong to the *Latter Day Psalms*" (1982). For instance the poem "Healers" (pp.231-32) is a sharp indictment on the credulous dependence of the average man on the spiritual charlatans who make a thriving trade for themselves dispensing the sought after magic mantras :

The unplanned city has a death wish, Everybody is in business buying cures, So the healers come in droves.

Their casual mesage of dismissing everything at par - except the spurious bliss that they offer - " give up everything or nothing / and be saved . The Master / knows the secret. " - becomes an ironic comment on the other worldly emphasis in much of Indian Philosophy.

"The Patriot" and "The Professor", from *Very Indian Poems in Indian English* (pp.237-39), likewise show up the typical middle-class preoccupation of the urban citizen. In the case of the patriot the rhetoric of public concerns is employed to show up the limitations of the very concerned citizen. Bruce King gives a succinct account of the mentality, "The Patriot" is a portrait of a confused mind which has withdrawn into a parody of Gandhism, mistaking platitudes for thought and action. "⁶

Ezekiel does not use the structure of mythical framework except perhaps that of the pastoral myth, a point that would be developed in the subsequent chapter. All the same his short aphoristic lines and stanzas, which take off either from the vedic hymns or the Bible are reworkings of age old wisdom in the texture of modern day living.

Keki N. Daruwalla's socio-cultural landscape has a much wider ambit as compared to Ezekiel's modern day city. Although Daruwalla like Ezekiel belongs to a minority community, but this fact does not inhibit his involvement with the Indian ethos spatially or temporally. Again in terms of his background and profession Daruwalla belongs to what is termed as the , professional elite- a privileged minority , however for his sympathetic projection of the hinterland and the more or less hapless condition of the inhabitants, he remains unique amongst Indian English poets. The terms of his engagement with the socio-cultural backdrop are not bifurcated along the rural-urban divide. His profession of a Police Officer would have contributed in a good measure to this perceptual impartiality, as well as given him an exposure to the human conditions beyond the pale of urban awareness. This inference being a little outside the terms of literary reviewing , we could ignore the conditions of this engagement and concentrate on its manifestations in poetic language.

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Daruwalla has a fine perception of the dramatic elements in a given situation , very often it is this perception that becomes his point of entry into a moment of crisis . This is evident in the poems like , "Curfew - In a Riot-Torn City", and " Pestilence " (*Under Orion*, 1970). If these two poems brought out the moment of crisis in different settings , the " Monologue In The Chambal Valley" highlights the rampant corruption in the system. However the real indictment of the system that is just not able to cope up with the spectre of drought comes through in the set of poems entitled " Hunger '74". Somewhere in an interior place, where even roots have gone out of supply , the frantic request is for ," Rice Specials at once!", the word that is bounced back from the capital is :

" Silo owners have gone off for the night. Despatching armed police instead." ⁷ 61

In this section Daruwalla's focus is not so much on the arraignment, as on the suffering and desperate condition of the villagers :

> They sprained their neck looking up for clouds the light so harsh that corneas started smoking at the edges.

> > (Winter Poems, p.23)

Likewise the, "Ghagra In Spate" (*Under Orion*), exposes the vulnerability of human societies living precariously at the edge of natural calamity.

Daruwalla's toughest engagement with the socio-cultural aspects of the Indian backdrop takes place in the context of the ossified traditions and rituals. Human superstition , credulity and greed have made the religiosity associated with places of worship like ," Shiva At Lodheshwar", suspect in the eyes of a more critical observer like the poet himself . Here Shiva's worship seems more of a commercial enterprise and the poet expresses his outrage at the defilement in the form of an apostrophe :

> Cave-God to me who have seen you in your habitat -- a thought lost in its own intensity Lord of the cave of the yeti print and the vulture eyrie

you have come to the wrong place.

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(Under Orion, p.28)

Daruwalla's attitude to the unchallenged sanctities of traditional faith and belief is best expressed in his own manner :

Where will it take you this search for the myth-worm behind the membrane of fact ?

(Myth Talk, Under Orion, p. 41)

Crossing Of Rivers very successfully integrates the tensions of the poet's psyche as they alternate between disgust and anguish at the present murky state of the river Ganga . It is not with the zeal of an environmentalist that Daruwalla expresses his anguish at the defilement of the river Ganga but with a point of view of an average , educated modern day Indian who cherishes his natrual heritage . In the "Boat-Ride Along The Ganga" he writes :

I listen avidly to his legend talk striving to forget what I chanced to see : the sewer - mouth trained like a canon on the river's flank

(Crossing of Rivers p. 11)⁸

Another poem titled "Vignette I" belonging to the same section, gives a vivid account of the grotesque medley at the river front. The whole place littered with an assortment of huddled lepers, gibbereing monkeys overhead and ritual bathers, only looks like a confused "desert of human lives". In its daily recurrence it is an unrelieved situation:

> The sun comes up like the outer husk of some fiery despair.

The Ganga flows swollen with hymns

(Crossing of Rivers, p.16)

It is not only the culture and traditions of the Hindu majority which are responded to in Daruwalla's poetry, but also the world of the Muslim culture with its distinct ambience, which is depicted in the group, of poems entitled," In The Shadow Of The Imambara". In the poem titled 'The Parsi Hell' that belongs to another section, "The Unrest of Desire ", Daruwalla gives an insiders view of the peculiar predicament of the Parsi, shackled as he is in the grips of an unrelenting tradition. In its entirety Daruwalla's involvement with the Indian socio-cultural milieu is truly comprehensive as he manages to incorporate not only the disparate cultural norms of varied origins, but also the stuctures of history and myth.

As we move on to Jayanta Mahapatra we find his socio-cultural milieu to be more homogenized than Daruwalla's , as it takes its colouring from a singular , long enduring tradition, that frames an entire region . Mahapatra though a Christian , finds himself drawn to the immensity of this religious myth as it puts him in touch with the forgotten abyss of years . Through its medium he is able to make a personal tryst with his racial and cultural heritage , in the poem *Relationship* (1980).

Mahapatra writes in an autobiographical note of his deep sensitization to the reverbrations of the vedic prayer mantras - "Above all I experience the stillness of time as never before ; and for the first time heard the reverbration of words such as these from the *AtharvaVeda* :

Time created the earth, in time burns the Sun,

in time are all existences , in time the eye looks away .

... I realized I was now looking upin life on a different level".⁹

Along with a deep atunement to the spiritual and philosophical essence of the religious tradition , that has invested not only the temples of 'Konark' and 'Puri' with a special aura but also the entire region ; Mahapatra finds in his psyche a sense of critical distance also from the scenes of ritual worship . Several of his poems contain this critical perspective . "Somewhere My Man" integrates the foregrounded individual so thoroughly with his backdrop , that the poem with a deceptive sense of silent stasis plummets the depths of his submerged psyche :

He knows his fathers well . His mind , like the sun , gently climbs the godly hill of day will not touch or reveal the many levels

of himself.

(Selected Poems, p. 10)¹⁰

In another poem "Dawn at Puri", the shackling effect of the hallowed tradition is distinctly visible in images like :

White -clad widowed women past the centres of their lives are waiting to enter the great Temple.

If in the Daruwalla we have scenes of human vulnerability - with Mahapatra it is the tenacity of the human beings that comes across, sustained by traditional patterns of thought and belief, and by an all

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subsuming myth. Mahapatra's landscapes are dotted with the presence of disease and death. It is as if the hoary tradition dwarfs the suffering humanity into total insignificance.

Before we move on to the diaspora poets, it would be worthwhile to make a brief mention of the points of similarity in the three poets considered so far . Ezekiel , Daruwalla and Mahapatra all three are outspoken in their criticism of the social malaise and the conditions of destitution , as well as of the false religiosity that mythifies even want and squalor .

Moving on to the younger generation - there is a difference in terms of attitiudes towards the social chaos so broadly visible in India . They have less of an immediacy of involvement , less of anger . The terms and dimensions of their involvement are more personal even in relation to the mythic past and the cultural heritage . Their attitude to the socio-cultural landscape does not build out of the common perceptions . Family history becomes more important for them rather than a collective destiny as in Mahapatra and Daruwalla . However in their tendency to question received myths , their attitude is not very different from the senior poets only a little more quizzical .

Agha Shahid Ali's response to his milèu is imbued with the strong sense of nostalgia and displacement . Along with this there is also a new facility for adaptation to new situations . For him rebuilding family history becomes very important as it is this constant stringing of the past which There are find memory of domains of the connects his various experiences of displacement, however his stance towards his religious heritage, 'Bones' ("Bone Sculpture"), for eg. and towards his chauvinistic male progenitors, 'Snowmen' (Half-Inch), is a what he seems to cherich more is the legacy of when Poetry and more; little distanced? or dr of Grootid, Mir, Taip and the more of they un Atentory

His search is not so much for roots, which he knows he cannot strike with his experience of dispossesion, as for contextual relevance. So America, his new home provides modern paradigms to Majnoon's search in the "Nostalgist's Map of America". There are likewise reworkings of Red Riding Hood's strory from the point of view of a modern young girl. "Bell Telephone Hours" in its absurd fst conversation becomes a strategy to cope with the loss of self - identity ("A Walk through the Yellow Pages").

Sudeep Sen captures the aura and mystique of Indian gods and godesses very successfully in his poems like , "Triple Moon of The Trident" (*Lunar Visitations*) and *Kali in Ottava-Rima*. However in the poem , "Durga Puja" he is able to present a picture at the close of the religious ritual and then the majestic Durga of the earlier lines looks a liittle bewildered , "now one of the multitude -- a rare frozen moment when the gods look human ." (*Kali in Ottava Rima*)¹¹ There are other poems that take a critical look at the Indian ethos , for instance "A Pilgrimage to Mathura " , and "Calcutta Vignettes" (*Lunar Visitations*). In *New York Times* he is able to present his experiences of the mega city in a different context of hurried pace , loneliness , heightened self awareness ; the focus being on the individual in the crowd.

Sujata Bhatt builds all her poems out of a very personal response to her surroundings. This leads to the placement of different cultural situations side by side in her poems. It is not only connections between different cultural and geographical locales that she is able to establish in her poems, but also beween the present and the past; between the individual and the larger dimension of history. In the poem, "For Nanabhai Bhatt" (*Brunizem*), for eg. the focus is on her grandfather and not on Gandhiji. Likewise in, "Devibhen Pathak" (*Monkey Shadows*) the grandmother gets the larger focus and not the incidental German connection.

Sujata Bhatt's observations on the Indian socio-cultural contexts are presented in a very sympathetic manner as in several poems that deal with women protagonists like "Buffaloes" (*Brunizem*), "A Story for Pearse" (*Monkey Shadows*). "Eurydice Speaks" can be seen as a counterpart to these poems in a world of different social mores. Bhatt's reconstructions of many childhood associations, "Understanding the Ramayana" (*Monkey Shadows*) for instance, give a different adult perception to the simple joys of childhood. Likewise her questonings of many a received myth, as in "A Different way to Dance", and "What Happened to the Elephant" ? (*Monkey Shadows*) give a fresh perspective to the age old stories, highlighting the stark realities of cruelty and death even in legend and lore.

After this callicated focus on the socio-cultural aspects of the poets' landscape, it that the charge of inauthenticity about Indian English Poetry is merely a shibboleth. The poets have a very involved

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THE GEOGRAPHICAL LANDSCAPE

This chapter attempts to show that the Indian English Poet derives his sense of rootedness in a very substantial manner from the actual physical landscape of India. Both, the content and the language of his poetry take their colouring in a good measure from the physical locale. This locale varies with the individual poets in terms of their actual association with the place , either in the present or in the past. Therefore it is not incorrect to say that Indian English poetry is essentially regional in inspiration , though certainly not confined to those geographical limits, especially as the actual physical contours of the landscape take on new configuration through recalled memories and imaginative reconstructions. These new configurations are indispensable for the diaspora poets .

Like poetry written in other languages and lands, Indian English poetry draws its sustenance from the native soil, and nourished by it, acquires the comprehensive appeal of universal relevance. It gains in authenticity from the poet's sincere response to his physical landscape, which presents a very different picture from the conventional idyllic notions of natural beauty. It is not always amplitude of physical space and serenity , often it is the unplanned maze of the city or the country-side with want and misery writ large on it. In the context of rampant destitution and general social malaise which give a bleaker aspect to the natural scene, the binary opposition of the city and the country is not sustainable, and poets like Keki Daruwalla and Jayanta Mahapatra are only too sensitive to the vitiated aspects of the landscape, to attempt any such unrealistic picture. Landscape has its own distinct scenic features , but even more distinctly individualized is the response of the human mind to its natural environment. In the case of the poet , it is this individual response which manifests itself in the expressive range of his language . This point of orientation becomes an interesting approach to study the work of the poets here.

Nissim Ezekiel makes the city , with the fragmented view that it offers, a dominant presence in his poetry. His singular distinction is in being the poet of the urban landscape . The mechanical response of the city dweller to his uninspiring environment is brought out in several of his poems. "Urban" integrates the dreariness of the individual's routine with that of the city in lines such as " He knows the broken roads and moves / In circles tracked within his head" (*Unfinished Man*, p.117) ¹ It is with reference to these lines that Prof. Bijay Kumar Das writes "the city is as much within him as without " ² This constricted and disoriented vision of the urban dweller cuts him off, from the world of nature and its rythms. This alienation of the individual from the world of nature is expressed in lines like the following :

At dawn he never sees the sky Which, silently are born again Nor feels the shadows of the night Recline their fingers on his eyes. He welcomes neither sun nor rain . His landscape has no depth or height.

(Urban)

There is no escape for him from the compulsive routine of the city which has so completely taken over his internal consciousness, that it even dictates its working :

> The city like a passion burns , He dreams of morning walks, alone. And floating on a wave of sand . But still his mind its traffic turns Anyway from beach and tree and stone To kindered of clamour close at hand.

> > ("Urban ")

In another poem "A Morning Walk", the unrelieved tedium of the ugly city even in terms of its unvarying climate is referred to in the lines " Barbaric city, sick with slums/ Deprived of seasons/ blessed with rains ". (p.119) This same city, in another poem from *Hymns In Darkness* (1976) is referred to as the "Island" (p.182). The choice of this title is with reference to the city but serves to highlight the lonely, amorphous existence of the city dweller. The opening stanza of the poem is a very compact statement on the interfusing character of the city and the city-dweller :

> Unsuitable for song as well as sense the island flowers into slums and skyscrappers, reflecting precisely the growth of my mind. I am here to find my way in it.

precisely the growth of my mind. I am here to find my way in it.

("Island" p. 182)

In an essay "Polyphenous voices in the City - Bombay's Indian English Fiction " the author Roshan G. Shahani writes, "the city is fashioned in the writer's own image, thus ceasing to be a geographical territory and becoming instead an imagined topos. " ³ The observation made in the context of the contemporary Indian English novelist, is just as relevant to Ezekiel's poetry.

The city is thus used as a trope , correspondingly there are extensive references to the unsullied world of nature , which is used as a metaphor of contrast to the city. The wistfulness about the lost natural world is evoked for instance in a compact line like "away, from, beach, tree, and stone " (p.117). Ezekiel uses the "city" and the "natural landscape" in terms of a binary opposition . While the city as an imagined topos , has an actual corresponding basis in reality, the natural world in Ezekiel's poetry has no such real geographical base, except on the periphery of the city. The "idyllic landscapes" belong to the realm of the purely wistful. The wistful yearning is partly the obvious *search* of the confined city dweller for a landscape of relief, and in part it could also be a wistfulness associated with , and nurtured on the tradition of English Romantic poetry. In terms of sub conscious influence the poet can benefit from a tradition that extends back in time to the myth of a pastoral idyll.

Ezekiel's use of this traditional metamorphic context has however been mediated by the influence of several other modes of writing , like the experiments of the Symbolists, the Imagists , and the city poets .However with the several literary influences, which in a muted manner shape the poet's idiom, the major, almost ubiquitous presence is of the city of Bomb ay .

Unlike Ezekiel , the geographical landscape of Daruwalla's is spatially extensive and varied . One encounters , plains, rivers, mountains and even the deserts in it. However the natural landscape in Daruwalla is rarely free from the human factor, especially in terms of human misery and vulnerability. "The Ghagra In Spate" gives a graphic account of the havoc brought by the flash floods in the river. Daruwalla often employs the technique of surprise, as in ,"Driving at dusk you wouldn't know / there's flood 'on' / the landscape is so superbly equipoised" (*Under Orion* pp.78-80)⁴. The fields are already innundated and what remains is the black stretch of the road "running between the stars", however the unexpected sudden torrent comes down from the higher region and it is described as:

And suddenly at night the north comes to the village riding on river-back Twenty minutes of a nightmare spin and fear turns phantasimal as half a street goes churning in the river belly

(p. 78)

Daruwalla's imagery always corresponds to the requirements of the situation and images employed to describe the river are as stark as the ugliness left behind by her:

But its when she receeds that the ghagra turns bitchy sucking with animal heat,

.....

.....

she flees from the scene of her own havoc arms akimbo thrashing with pain behind her the land sinks.

(p.79)

The first secton in "*Crossing Of Rivers*(1976) is "The Waterfront" and it is a concentrated focus on the varied aspects of the river Ganga. It is a very successful poetic experiment in its integration of the natural landscape with the socio cultural nuances that are inseparable from it. The society and the civilization that has invested the river with the most sacred associations , has also vitiated its pristine natural character.

Ganga as it flows past the cremation ghats of Varanasi takes on an eerie character, as the poet contemplates the night scene, "As the night grows older / as flesh turns to carbon on the ghats / and the river keeps moving / dark as gangrene" (Nightscape. p. 13).⁵ The spectre of death and desecration is all too visible at day break too, in fact the gathering light appears to be" dragging a severed leg / along the streets of dawn" (Dawn p.14).

The actual visible desecrated state of the river , and the hoary tradition associated with it ,which continues to be deeply embedded in the Indian psyche , are totally at variance . In the two poems titled "Mother" and "River Silt", the poet reaches out for an imaginative projection into the abyss of the past as well as into the unknown space of the future, to gain a perspective of geological dimensions. Imagining the pristine state of the river ,he writes:

> You remember Your infant dialect of colours foam-white and king fisher - blue and the pure, transparent green in which grass could not be reflected ?

> > ("Mother" p.29)

Apart from these river poems, Daruwalla's poetry offers numerous other instances of a totally integrated picture of the natural backdrop and the human protagonists. 'Calender starting with June' in "Hunger 74" is one such instance. In a year of drought the spectre of starvation is described with a pronounced sense of helpless outrage:

> The ribs prominent : latitudes running around the body map . Ribs prominent ; had there been flesh or skin to encase them you could have used the rib -bowl to draw water from a well had there been water in the well .

(Winter Poems, p. 25)⁶

Daruwalla's geographical landscape takes its essence from a very close relationship to the socio-cultural or the socio-economic backdrop. The intensity of the poet's perception is only matched by the searing angst of his tone. Given this felt intensity of perception and expression Daruwalla's poems are one of the finest examples of the authentic response of the Indian English poet to his backdrop; a response that does not require the contrived effects of "thatched roofsand cowdung cakes".⁷

Daruwalla has also written many poems that have a more personal response to the environment. This response is closely related to the psychological dimensions revealed in terms of the extra ordinary moment of contact with the natural world. This includes many of the poems on the animal world for instance, "Death of a bird" (*Crossing of River*, p.47-49), projects the instinct of fear in the tense encounter between the pair of birds and the human lovers. "Crossing Chorhoti" from *Landscapes* (1987) projects the limits of human endurance , while scaling the heights , "At 16,000 feet, near Bamjor" (p.31) on way to Tibet. "Mandwa" the first poem of this collection is delightful reading experience for its unusual images like:

Morning : islands, like somnambulists Which had walked out on the mainland and awake to find themselves waist deep in the seas.

(Landscapes, p.!0)

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"Gulzaman's ,Son" another poem in this collection takes its ambience and incident from a remote place near Kanzalwan in Kashmir .From the depiction of the relative simplicity of a shepherd's life , in the remote hilly regions of the country to a different time zone of , "Coming into Heathrow", the poet retains his hallmark of unusual imagery , "At the day's end I land to find / morning has rearranged itself here" (*Landsacpes* , p.50). His imaginative capacity to reach out to distant time - space locales continues to be unusual , for eg. in the *Keeper of the Dead*, the cosmic dimensions of the wandering comet "Kohoutek" are incorporated , to show up the pettiness and folly of human supersition . In its totality Daruwalla's poetry shows the imaginative vitality and intuitive symapthy of his response to the environment .

As we turn to Jayanta Mahapatra , we find an equal intensity of involvement with the natural backdrop , as in the case of Daruwalla , but with the major difference that the limits of his physical landscape are confined to the region of Orissa . In this sense out of the poet's studied here , he is the most regional in inspiration .

This region is so deeply imbued with an all pervasive religiosity, that it colours the poet's peceptions about the world of Nature too . This happens to the extent that unlike in Daruwalla , there is in Mahapatra's poetry hardly any expression of sheer apppreciation for the natrual sights and sounds . The mention of the earth , sky , sea , rain , clouds , stone , river etc. is found repeatedly in his poems , but they are rarely referred to as pure natural phenomena , more often they are metaphors in association with deeper state of consciousness. Writing about Mahapatra's response to the world of external reality, M.K. Naik observes , "Nature *per-se* does not seem to interest him much , for he appears to be preoccupied with the human condition for which forces of nature often furnish apt metaphors".⁹

An instance of this quality is the poem "Evening Landscape By The River ", which focuses on the fishermen's broken hutments on the river bank, which "let even starlight slip out / from their weak roofs (*Life signs*, p 12)¹⁰. This and other human features of the scene are etched out but with hardly any details of the natural setting.

Likewise the poem "Beyond the Himalayan Ranges", uses the himalayan landscape, to develop multiple meanings of the word "Darkness", in association with the known boundary that "traps the sky" (*Life signs*, p. 8). The "Darkness" is the mutilation of a "leper's limb", it is the soporific effect of propagandist ideology; these meanings are far removed from the conventional associative range of the natural landscape.

With Mahapatra , associations of the natural landscape take on a surrealistic transformation , and therefore even in his long poem *Relationship* (1980), the images come in very unusual contexts ; as for eg. "time of the butterfly / moves inside the fierce body of the forest bear". In this poem , as personal associations blend with the larger myth of the temple , Mahapatra uses many different nature images for the concept of time , like "subterranean river", "the hidden spring" and , "grass of history".

As we turn to the diaspora poets, a marked sense of displacement communicates itself strongly through their reconstructions of actual physical spaces. These spaces left behind in time are recalled, either in new associations or simply converted into metaphors of mobility and transcendence. Thus actual physical displacement is turned to advantage through innovative linguistic strategies developed in response to the shifting existential context.

The geographical landscape of Agha Shahid Ali's poetry is deeply imbued with a sense of nostalgia . Therefore wistful memories of different physical locales have a dominant presence in his verse . The opening poem "Postcard from Kashmir" of *The Half-Inch Himalayas* (1987) chalks out the enormous distance that is there now , between the poet and his native homeland in Kashmir . As he receives the picture postcard that very compactly contains the immensity of the Himalayas , the poet cannot help but use the ironic posture , "I always loved neatness , now I hold / the halfinch Himalayas as in my hands" (p. 1) ¹²

Displacement and exile are states of loneliness, that condition the poet to turn inwards to a process of recall, small snippets of memory, often in discontinuous settings and contexts helps him build a personal history. Fo instance, the poem "Snowmen", tells us about the ancestor, "a man / of Himalayan snow / come to Kashmir from Samarkand" (Half-Inch, p. 8). In other instances, for eg. "A Lost Memory of Delhi" The poet, imaginatively projects himself outside of time to be a witness to scenes of family history, reconstituted by him. In this poem he takes himself back to 1948, to the time when his mother was "a recent bride", and his father younger than what he is now. This strategy helps him go beyond the picture projected in the faded photographs of the family album.

Along with a sense of nostalgia that is conveyed through the deliberate resetting of old memories and associations , Agha Shahid Ali succeeds in evoking the charm of two worlds ; one gone and evanescent and the other in the present . This is done with regard to his family history and also in the wider context of a trans-cultural migration . At times there is a clear mental demarcation of boundaries , but more often these two worlds are inter-penetrating in the imagined space of his writings . For instance in "From Another Desert" , America and the sands of the desert where Majnoon wandered in his unavailing search for the beloved , fuse into one imagined topos (Nostalgists' Map of America)¹³.

While there is with Agha Shahid Ali an easy facility to shift places mentally, there is also an attachment to personal space - that comes across vividly in poems like "Vacating an Apartment" and "The Previous Occupant" (Half-Inch, pp. 38-41).

Sudeep Sen , like Agha Shahid Ali expresses in his poetry an attachment with personal space ,which can be real or the configuration of a surrealistic approach to places , where he is often the lonely and passive protagonist . It is a context of alienation but then for an itinerant poet , it is not an unusual predicament .

Unlike Agha Shahid Ali, Sen does not invest his locales and spaces with a historical dimension. His is the response of the immediate

moment of observation , which at times is direct and otherwise abstracted. *Lunar Visitations* (1990) is a record of his perigrinations within India and abroad , and of the impressions that he gathered in what appears to be a manner of random spontaneity . The "moon" is employed as a metaphor for the subjective states of the consciousness , and this device gives a universal validity , to what are in essence his own subjective perceptions . "A Pilgrimage to Mathura" , "Calcutta Vignettes" are composed in this manner and that is again employed in a poem like "April Night in Harlem" However poems like "Remembering Hiroshima Tonight" and "Triple Moon of the Trident" have a more reflective depth to them . In the *New York Times* the approach to the landscape is in terms of the momentum of the city , that dictates its own pace on the individual .

Sujata Bhatt , again gives us an itinerant perspective across the three continents , Asia , Europe and America . However unlike the other two diaspora poets studied here , she has acquired an ease of adaptibility that makes her feel at home in both America and Germany , the locales of her student and married life . In that sense "India" her motherland has become the distanced space . The fact of actual exile from the motherland in her case does not transform itself into an imagined topos as in some other poets ; with her it takes the form of strategies of bridging the gulf between the continents . The most pronounced and innovative strategy in her case is that of poetic-billinguism , where not just semantic interplay but actual use of sound and script is made .

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The appeal that the hybrid coinage *Brunizem*, had for her is obvious in the context of the transnational choices of her life. Apart from the dark brown, prairie common soil, the other referrent of commonality is the mediating expanse of the sea with its undercurrents that lap the shores of all the continents, hence the metaphoric import of the "Undertow" (p. 89)¹⁴.

Other than the linguistic multi-contextuality a free play of associations allows her to recapture the memories of her childhood . "The (M, Shadhow)Rooster in Conil", is one such poem where the memories of her "grandfather's house in Bhavnagar" come crowding in the rooms at Conil . While there is a wistfulness in her memories of India , it does not prevent her from giving herself to her immediate environment sympathetically . "Wine from Bordeaux" is a poem that could be written only after the Chernobyl disaster , "He doesn't like / to ingest anything harvested / in Europe after 1985 " (*Monkey Shadows* , p. 63) . However it is not so much for the fastidious man , as for the post '86 babies and their anxious mothers that her heart goes out . Apart from this time and place of crisis there are in Bhatt's poetic landscape several places which are a delight to be visited ; one such midnight blue land is "Beyond Edinburgh" , which is in Bhatt's own words "the edge of the world I know - " (p. 105) .

To conclude, the geographical landscape of the poets discussed here is as varied as their individual backgrounds, its metaphoric import also becomes a very personal expression of the poet's consciousness. However in its totality, if such a comprehensive perspective can be tentaivly deduced ; the geographical landscape takes on the amorphousness of the city , the expanse of the world outside the city as well as the open space of trans national movement beyond the geographical limits of the country .

NOTES

- 1. Nissim Ezekiel , *Collected poems : 1952 -1988*(Delhi O.U.P., 1989), p 117.
- Bijay Kumar Das , Imagery in the Poetry Of Nissim Ezekiel", *Perspectives on Nissim Ezekiel*, ed. Suresh Chandra Dwivedi, (New Delhi , Kitab Mahal, 1989)
- Roshan G.Shahani , "Polyphonous Voices in the city: Bombay's Indian English Fiction , *Economis and Political Weekly* XXX, No. 21, May 27. pp. 250-255.
- 4. Keki N. Daruwalla , *Under Orion* (Calcutta, Writer's Workshop, 1970), pp.78-79.
- Keki N. Daruwalla, Crossing Of Rivers (Delhi, O.U.P., 1976)
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- Keki N. Daruwalla , *Winter Poems*(1980, New Delhi : Indus, 1991) p.25.
- P. Lal ed. Modern Indian poetry in English: An Anthology and a Credo (Calcutta: Writer's Workshop ,1969) pp. 93-95.
- 8. Keki N. Daruwalla , Landscapes (Delhi O.U.P, 1987) p.10
- M.K.Naik, "Two Worlds OfJayanta Mahapatra's Imagery,". *The poetry Of Jayanta Mahapatra:A Critical Study*, ed. Madhusudan Prasad. (New Delhi : Sterling Publishers , 1986) p. 99.

- 10. Jayanta Mahapatra, Life Signs (Delhi: O.U.P., 1983) p.10
- 11. ____, ____, ____ Selected Poems (Delhi O.U.P. 1987) p. 38.
- 12. Aga Shahid Ali , *Half Inch Himalayas* (Middletown Connecticut: Wesleyen Univ. Press,1987) p.1.
- Aga Shahid Ali, "Nostalgists Map Of America " The Beloved Witness: Collected Poems (New Delhi: Viking ,1992) pp.57-65.
- 14. Sujata Bhatt, *Brunizem* (1988; Carcanet, New Delhi, Penguin, 1993) p.89-90.
- 15. Sujata Bhatt, *Monkey Shadows* (1991, Carcanet, New Delhi; Penguin, 1993) pp. 101-102.

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CONCLUSION

The foregoing chapters have been an attempt to study the complex relationship of the contemporary Indian English poet to his native backdrop, given the varying cross pulls of identification and distantiation. India happens to be the very real and and insistent geo-political, socio-culture reality for the poet. This reality whether a burden ¹ or a heritage remains a major existential determinant for him giving sustenance and shape to his creativity.

A certain degree of alienation is in-built into this relationship, since it happens to be concomitant with the modern spirit of critical enquiry. Augmenting this is the fact that the secularized outlook of the modern Indian English Poet is at variance from the essentialist character of the traditional Indian world view and this itself becomes a distancing factor. Here one cannot play down the role of the English language in shaping the sensibility, especially in the context of the considerable grounding required as a pre-requisite for the poetic vocation. Given this background , it is not surprising that Indian poet writing in English is seen as not only alienated and elitist but also as collaborator to new modes of cultural domination.² This charge cannot be wished away as it is a valid poser given the facts of our colonial history. However if with reference to the past, it is important to set the record straight, it is just as imperative to take an unblinkered view of the present and future status of English writing in India. English and Indian writing in English is here to stay, and while one has to be wary of the nexus between covert politics of influence and cultural domination, one also has to be on guard against nativist zealots and their propaganda. In the surcharged atmosphere of pro and anti English controversy, it is worth reminding ourselves that English education even in the hey-days of the British Empire and Lord Macaulay's famous minutes of 1835, paved the way for a revivalist phase in Indian sociocultural life. Given the climate of national assertion and confidence, in many other third world countries , one can perhaps guard oneself better against the dangers of neo-imperialism by being more cautious to the forays of foreign capital and economic control, rather than getting alarmed at the more innocuous and indegenized forms of English dissemination .

Returning to the poets the atmosphere of controversy in which they function often clouds the very real merit of their poetry. The Indian English poets have contributed very significantly to the process of acculturation of the English language. In response to their environment ,they have used the English language with resilience , given to the poetry the richness of their individual experiences and in the process brought in a multi-cultural plurality to the entire corpus.

Their contribution should be seen not as a form of neo-colonial domination - but rather as a reverse liberating process of indegenisation . The age-old adage , that literature takes its sap from the soil , holds good

even in this case, and the undeniable Indian reality defines the character of this poetry more than any imposed constructions of a foreign culture.

Reflecting the multi cultural plurality of India the poets retain very distinct identities. Their work reflects the amorphousness of the city, as much as the confines of a specific region. The awareness of trans-cultural locations that the diaspora poets bring in , challenges the notion of nation-state boundries with regard to literature. ³ In its multi-cultural plurality, Indian English poetry, draws strength from the holistic inclusiveness of Indian Civilization that predates the latter day political unity of the nation-state ⁴. This inclusiveness allows a valid cultural space for the interactive creativity of the Indian English poet whose status is often disparagingly dubbed as marginal in relation to the regional cultures.

For the formal requirements of a cohesive point of view, the personal angle in the poetry of the selected six poets has not been dealt with fully at length. The focus has been on determining the wider parameters of their Indian identity.

If Indianness is a "burden" it is certainly not one of , the Indian English poet's own seeking. It is the burden of a historical anomaly, that gave him access to a pan-Indian language , and a modern secular outlook, and yet imperceptibly, it also acted as a major factor distancing him from his native roots and causing a certain loss of identity. In this context his poetic vocation offers him an opportunity of reclaiming that lost identity through the act of writing. This identity which was lost somewhere, in the historical accident of hybridization , can be retrieved only with reference to the Indian ethos. It is in coming to terms with the 'burden' of "Indianness" whether seen as an actual physical reality or as a metaphoric construct that the poet can resurrect his identity and claim what is his rightful heritage.

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