

PREFACE

In the curricular structure introduced by this University for students of Post Graduate degree programme, the opportunity to pursue Post Graduate course in Subjects introduced by this University is equally available to all learners. Instead of being guided by any presumption about ability level, it would perhaps stand to reason if receptivity of a learner is judged in the course of the learning process. That would be entirely in keeping with the objectives of open education which does not believe in artificial differentiation.

Keeping this in view, study materials of the Post Graduate level in different subjects are being prepared on the basis of a well laid-out syllabus. The course structure combines the best elements in the approved syllabi of Central and State Universities in respective subjects. It has been so designed as to be upgradable with the addition of new information as well as results of fresh thinking and analyses.

The accepted methodology of distance education has been followed in the preparation of these study materials. Co-operation in every form of experienced scholars is indispensable for a work of this kind. We, therefore, owe an enormous debt of gratitude to everyone whose tireless efforts went into the writing, editing and devising of a proper lay-out of the materials. Practically speaking, their role amounts to an involvement in invisible teaching. For, whoever makes use of these study materials would virtually derive the benefit of learning under their collective care without each being seen by the other.

The more a learner would seriously pursue these study materials the easier it will be for him or her to reach out to larger horizons of a subject. Care has also been taken to make the language lucid and presentation attractive so that may be rated as quality self-learning materials. If anything remains still obscure or difficult to follow, arrangements are there to come to terms with them through the counselling sessions regularly available at the network of study centres set up by the University.

Needless to add, a great part of these efforts is still experimental—in fact, pioneering in certain areas. Naturally, there is every possibility of some lapse or deficiency here and there. However, these do admit of rectification and further improvement in due course. On the whole, therefore, these study materials are expected to evoke wider appreciation the more they receive serious attention of all concerned.

Dr. Surabhi Banerjee
Vice-Chancellor

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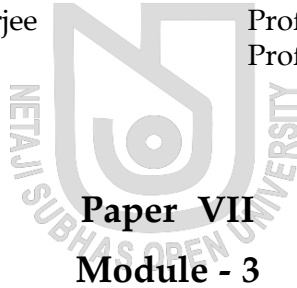
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SUBJECT COMMITTEE

Members

Prof. Tirthankar Chatterjee
Prof. Dipak Kumar Das

Prof. Shanta Mahalanobish
Prof. Prolay Kumar Deb



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Unit 1 Prof. Sucheta Mukherjee
Unit 2 Prof. Dipannita Dutta
Unit 3 Prof. Dipannita Dutta
Unit 4 Prof. Sandhya Sen
Unit 5 Prof. Kaberi Chatterjee

Editing

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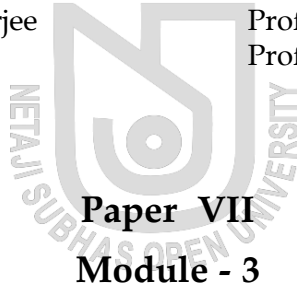
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Paper VII
Module - 3

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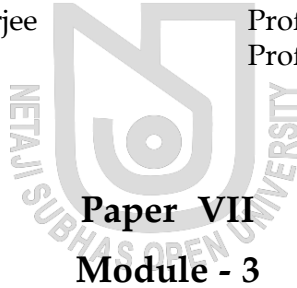
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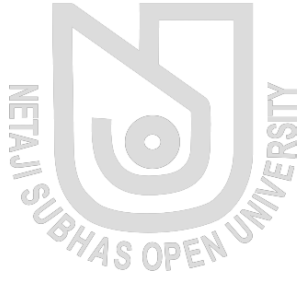
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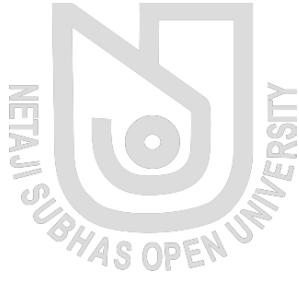
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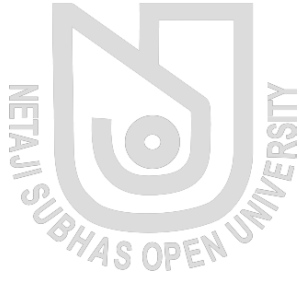
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OPEN UNIVERSITY**

**Post Graduate Course in English
PG. Eng-7**

Paper—VII



Module

3

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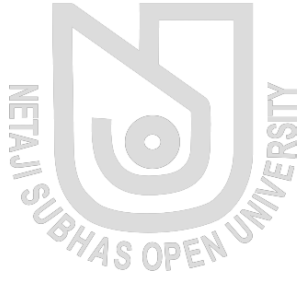
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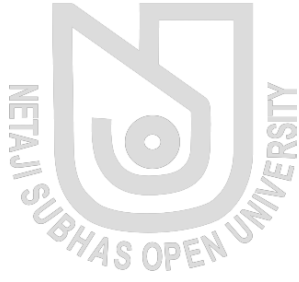


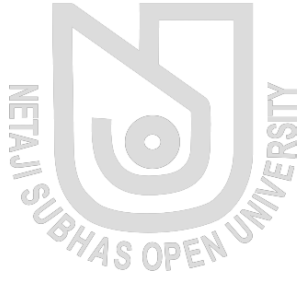
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Unit 1 Henry Louis Vivian Derozio

Structure :

- 1.1 Objectives
- 1.2 Introduction : The Poet
- 1.3 Critical Analysis of Texts : Sonnets
 - A. To The Pupils of The Hindu College
 - B. The Harp of India
 - C. Chorus of Brahmins
- 1.4 Literary Labels
- 1.5 Postcolonial : Basic Concepts
- 1.6 Questions
- 1.7 References

1.1 Objectives

From study of this unit you will be able to understand Derozio the Man, his contribution to English poetry written in India and the context from which such works arose.

1.2 Introduction : The Poet

Henry Louis Vivian Derozio (1809-1831) is acknowledged as the first Indo-Anglian poet. His father, was Indo-Portuguese and mother English. Though a Eurasian, Derozio identified himself completely with India. He was educated at Dr. Drummond's Academy. This dour Scotsman instilled in Derozio a love for literature and free thought. At fourteen he joined his father's mercantile firm as clerk and then his uncle's indigo plantation at Bhagalpur. His early verses were noticed by Dr. John Grant editor of India Gazette which he later joined as Assistant Editor. Derozio's reputation as poet and scholar earned him the position of Assistant Master at Hindu College (later Presidency College) when barely eighteen. This dynamic young man went beyond teaching English literature. He made his students think for themselves, ask questions and not shrink from the right answers. Among his students were Dakshinaranjan Mukherjee, Krishnamohan Banerjee, Radhanath Sikdar,

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Ramtanu Lahiri, Pearychand Mitra, all of whom later made important contributions to the cultural life of India. The young minds were deeply influenced by Derozio's personal charm, intellectual brilliance, liberal ideas and zeal for social reform. This influence went into the making of the first generation of what later came to be called the Bengal Renaissance.

Derozio's ideas questioned centuries-old customs and superstitions; Hindu orthodox forces attacked Derozio. Forced to leave Hindu College, Derozio drifted briefly back to journalism. He passed away in his twenty-third year.

"The marvellous boy who perished in his prime" had a brief poetic career from 1825 to 1831. He published two volumes of poetry : *Poems* (1827) and *The Fakeer of Jungheera : A Metrical tale and other Poems'* (1828). He attempted several poetic forms like narrative verses, ballads, lyrics and sonnets. Unsurprisingly his poems echo the English romantic poets in theme and imagery. Special influences were Scott, Moore, Byron and Shelley. Oaten compared him to Keats for "in both men there was a passionate temperament combined with unbounded sympathy with Nature. Both died when their powers were not yet fully developed," Derozio visualized a human condition when

Man to man the world o'er
Shall brothers be and a that,
From his beloved motherland he desired only "one kind wish from the"
[‘To India My Native Land’]

1.3 Critical Analysis of Texts : Sonnets

To the Pupils of the Hindu College

Expanding like the petals young flowers
I watch the gentle opening of your minds,
And the sweet loosening of the spell that binds
Your intellectual energies and powers
That stretch (like young birds in soft summer hours)
Their wings to try their strength O how the winds
Of circumstances and freshening April showers

Ramtanu Lahiri, Pearychand Mitra, all of whom later made important contributions to the cultural life of India. The young minds were deeply influenced by Derozio's personal charm, intellectual brilliance, liberal ideas and zeal for social reform. This influence went into the making of the first generation of what later came to be called the Bengal Renaissance.

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Of early knowledge and unnumbered kinds
Of new perceptions shed their influence,
And how you worship truth's omnipotence'
What joyance rains upon me when I see
Fame in the mirror of futurity,
Weaving the the chaplets you have yet to gain,
An then I feel I have not lived in vain.

2

The Harp of India

Why hang'st thou lonely on you withered bough?
Unstrung for ever, mast thou there remain;
Thy music once was sweet—who hears it now?
Why doth the breeze sigh over thee in vain?
Silence hath bound thee with her fatal chain;
Neglected, mute, and desolate art thou,
Like ruined monument on desert plain:
O! many a hand more worthy far than mine
Once thy harmonious chords to sweetness gave,
And many a wreath for them did Fame entwine
Of flowers still blooming of the minstrel's gave:
Those hands are cold—but if thy notes divine
May be by mortal wakened once again,
Harp of my country, let me strike the strain!

3

Chorus of Brahmins

Scatter, scatter flowerets round,
Let the tinkling cymbal sound;
Strew the scented orient spice,
Prelude to the sacrifice;
Bring the balm, and bring the myrrh,
Sweet as is the breath of her
Who upon the funeral pyre

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Let pure incense to the skies
Like the heart's warm wishes rise,
Till, unto the lotus throne
Of the great Eternal One
High ascending, it may please
Him who guides our destinies.
Bring the pearl of purest white,
Bring the diamond flashing light;
Bring your gifts of choicest things,
Fans of peacocks, starry wings'
Gold refined, and ivory,
Branches of the sandal tree,
Which their fragrance still impart
Like the good man's injured heart,
This its triumph, this its boast,
Sweetest 'tis when wounded most!
Ere he sets, the golden sun
Must with richest gift be won,
Ere his glorious brow he lave
In you sacred yellow wave,
Rising through the realms of air
He must hear the window's prayer—
Haste ye, haste, the day declines
Onward, onward while he shines,
Let us press, and all shall see
Glory of our Deity.

(‘The Fakeer of Jungheer’)

Derozio can be said to have introduced the sonnet to India. Modelled on Romantic sonnets in theme and diction, the two prescribed in the course display some originality in attitude.

A. ‘To the Pupils of Hindu College’ :

The title clearly indicates the sonnet's theme and the group addressed. Derozio the teacher steps back and observes the growth of his student's minds.

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Watching the gradual maturing of young minds — shaped by heightened perception, pursuit of knowledge and truth — gives joy and true meaning to his life. Behind warm benedictory tone and affectionate voice one notes qualities he considers essential to education. Observation and understanding ("perceptions"), 'knowledge' outside and beyond books, a clear-eyed engagement with "truth" and reality ("circumstance") are listed as core elements. One recalls a precept this radical teacher enjoined upon his pupils.

"He who will not reason is a bigot, he who cannot reason is a fool, and he who does not reason is a slave."

The sonnet has an odd rhyme scheme with both Petrarchian and Shakespearean elements, though the thought develops without a break. The full stop in line 6 is simply a pause for breath.

The similes drawn from nature "unfolding petals", stretching wings", "loosening spell" lend an almost organic quality to unfurling minds. "April showers", "joyance", "freshening" bring Shellyian echoes and the personal pronouns clearly Romantic. The diction is not conventionally poetic. "Intellectual", "circumstance", "perception" and that unexpected rhyme "futurity" are barely mellifluous. How do you see them? Is it stilted language of the inept or a early glimpse of modernism and individuality? The felicity of phrase, the genuine feeling of the poem and the beauty of the last line are unmistakable.

B. The Harp of India

The 'harp' here represents all literature especially poetry. The sonnet is an address to the harp. Derozio grieves at the lost glory that was India and desires to reclaim it. Patriotism is blended with Byronic melancholy. The harp is essentially an image from Classical Greece but the Romantics also use it as an icon of bardic Song. Strains of Romantic poems are evident. Moore's *The Harp of Erin*, Shelley's *Ozymandias*, & Coleridge's *Eolian Harp* are intangibly present. The interrogative first line is remarkably dramatic. Do observe the innovative rhyme scheme where only four rhymes are intricately woven (abba, bab, cdcd, cbb) and the idea runs straight through in a lively, sensitive text. Unmistakable authenticity of patriotic utterance is in every line and in the phrase "my country".

Watching the gradual maturing of young minds — shaped by heightened perception, pursuit of knowledge and truth — gives joy and true meaning to his life. Behind warm benedictory tone and affectionate voice one notes qualities he considers essential to education. Observation and understanding ("perceptions"), 'knowledge' outside and beyond books, a clear-eyed engagement with "truth" and reality ("circumstance") are listed as core elements. One recalls a precept this radical teacher enjoined upon his pupils.

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C. Chorus of Brahmins

The title poem of Derozio's second published volume is 'The Fakeer of Jungheera'. It is a sustained narrative of star-crossed love set against the picturesque Bhagalpur region. He had absorbed the sights, sounds, fragrances of the location during the lonely day spent on his uncle's indigo plantation, He wrote :

"It struck me as a place where achievements in love and war might well take place and the double character I had heard of the Fakeer together with some acquaintance with the scenery induced me to form a tale upon both these circumstances."

Nuleeni, a Brahmin widow is rescued from the 'sati' pyre by the bandit Fakeer, previously her suitor. Caste differences had forbidden that union. The idyll of the reunited lovers is short-lived as Nuleeni's relatives are determined to reclaim her. In the ensuing battle the outlaw chief is killed and the heart-broken Nuleeni expires in grief.

This fast moving tale has 52 sections where Derozio skilfully employs different metres to suit the changing tone and temper of the narrative. He uses the iambic four-foot couplet for straight-forward narration, but adopts a slower line for descriptive passages, anapaests for the battle, while the choruses of the chanting priests and the women round Nuleeni's funeral pyre are in trochaic and dactylic measures.

'Chorus of Brahmins' is a lyrical excerpt from the long poem. Here we do not find the poet's love of liberty or his attack on the caste system or the practice of 'Sati' and suppression of women. In the sensuous piling on of 'beauties' (reminiscent of *Eve of St. Agnes* by Keats) is the climax of a religious ritual, the activity before the Sacrifice. The Sun God is to be propitiated with "choicest" gifts, the ultimate of these being "the widow's prayer". Nuleeni's breath is "sweet"; she is listed among other "rich" offerings to Surya. Ironically the Eternal One is offered death not life and scent, spices, myrrh, sandalwood will embalm only ashes. The critique of cruelty in the name of religion is obvious. Trochaic tetrameter lines vividly reflect the frenetic pace of the preparations. The exotic East breathes in the list of items for the ritual and in the lyrical sweep we tend to overlook the ambiguity of "...it may please/Him who guides our destinies." Derozio bears deeper reading. Taken in isolation, the lyric may be wrongly seen as the defence of a barbaric practice. But the narrative, as already noticed, describes 'Nuleeni's escape from 'ATI'.

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1.4 Literary Labels

By the last quarter of the nineteenth century English hegemony over India was well established. English education was formally introduced when Warren Hastings set up the Calcutta Madrasa in 1871 though private schools imparting education in English existed long before. Vigorous western ideas percolated into conservative, almost stagnant Indian society and a new awakening spread through the elite class especially in Bengal. Macaulay's famous 'Minutes' ensured a good crop of "English Scholars" well versed in European literature. This educated upper class wrote in English to dialogue with authority and also express their own ideas.

It is this body of writings in English language that critics have sought to label. It is distinct from British writing "...in thought, feeling, emotion and experience" while remaining greatly influenced (at least in the early stages) by writing in England. It is both Indian literature and a variation of English literature. E. F. Oaten called it *Anglo-Indian* Literature but included the writings of Englishmen in India on Indian themes. Since Anglo-Indian also refers to a particular community, the label was inappropriate. P. Sheshadri, and G. Sampson did include both Indian writers in English and English writers on Indian subjects. Sampson refused to consider pre-independence writing as Indian. Indo-Anglian is an artificial term but has caught on in literary circles. It has the advantage that it describes the theme correctly but also can be used as adjective and as substantive. It however excludes translations from regional languages into English. Such works are often categorised as Indo-English, Direct, Spontaneous, creative writing alone is Indo-Anglian. Writers in America, Canada, Australia for instance write in English but such works are not considered simply as English literature. The term *Indian Writing in English* is now popularly used to designate artistic self-expression in English where Indian creative writing contributes richly to the common pool of world writing in English.

1.5 Postcolonial : Basic Concepts

The term 'postcolonial' was previously used as 'post-independence' or 'after colonialism'. But now, the connotation offered by Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin in *The Empire Writes Back : Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures* in

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generally accepted. They explain that their usage of the term covers "all the culture affected by the imperial process, from the moment of colonization to the present day, i.e. both pre-independence and post- independence. Thus, Indian writing in English as also the literature of African countries, Caribbean, Australian, Canadian etc. are all postcolonial literatures barring their distinctive regional characteristics. Nineteenth century colonial imperialism coincided with the acceptance of English literature (as opposed to classics) becoming a prestigious academic subject Gauri Viswanathan puts it succinctly :

"British colonial administrators, provoked by missionaries on the one hand and fears of native insubordination on the other, discovered an ally in English literature to support them in maintaining control of the natives under the guise of liberal education."

Postcolonial discourse is the oppositionality of the native to the Empire at the cultural and linguistic levels. In culture, 'English' of the political-economic masters becomes the 'centre'—the privileged canon and the touchstone of taste and value. Initially the 'peripheral' or 'marginalized' 'imitates' the 'norm', immersing itself wholly in the imported constructs. Language becomes the tool of power through which conceptions of 'truth', 'order' 'reality' is established. Later on into your course you will see how language itself (together with content and perspective) subverts its privilege and hegemony. Standard English of the 'centre' is transformed into several distinctive varieties of English.

Derozio and his contemporaries used the language of the imperial rulers, retained its syntax and literary genres while foregrounding 'marginal' experience like rituals of 'sati'. Descriptions and images of the exotic East with its barbaric "otherness" is another aspect of this discourse. The Eurasian community of which Derozio was a member were in an unhappy position as they were rejected by the West and East alike and looked down upon by both, Consequently a sense of "alienation" coloured his sensibility. This perception of "otherness" by native writers is another postcolonial feature.

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1.6 Questions

1. Can Derozio be called a romantic poet?
2. Write an essay on Derozio's craftsmanship from the two sonnets in your course.
3. What features of Derozio's poetry place him as an early nineteenth century poet?

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Unit 2 Sarojini Naidu

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- 2.2 Background and location of Sarojini Naidu : The in-between place.
- 2.3 Influence on Sarojini : Contradictory Criticisms
- 2.4 On Sarojini's Books of Poem—with reviews
- 2.5 Sarojini's Favourite Poets of The West
- 2.6 Conclusion : General
- 2.7 Assessment
- 2.8 Notes
- 2.9 Village Song : An Analysis
 - 2.9.1 Structure and Style
 - 2.9.2 Questions
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- 2.10 If You Call Me : An Analysis
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- 2.11 Caprice : An Analysis
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Sarojini Naidu, the “Nightingale of India”, in many ways, like Toru Dutt belongs to the same phase in Indo-Anglian Writing. Sarojini’s verse echoes the lyric forms of her contemporary *fin-de-siecle* British poets; the mood is lyrical, passionate and sentimental, as the heart compels, though the local colour is Indian. Sarojini’s themes of poetry are almost similar to that of Toru. And yet, the techniques and the images Sarojini uses are individual. If

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2.1. Introduction : A critique on Sarojini Naidu, a poet of Colonial India.

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Toru Dutt, in the anxiety to present a pure, uncorrupted India transforms the Indian landscape morally into a western one, and her heroines into virtuous Victorians, Naidu composes a land and a people that fits into different, more exotic area in the western imagination. She feeds essentially feudal, Vedic and Islamic cultural formations into what was the structure of Victorian sentiment. And where women were concerned, these diverse patriarchal cultures were surprisingly accommodative and reinforcing of each other; where the object and the detail are Indian but the taste is western. The women she portrays are often not just conventional and subordinate, but appear “to endorse the patriarchy themselves in their words, images and attitudes... Sarojini’s deliberate espousal of ephemerality and her cultivated anti-intellectualism aligns her to all those whose voices and words were lost, who were outside the purview of the high-brow, male-dominated notion of great art”. (Paranjape, Makrand *Selected Poetry And Prose* 18). Certainly, there is something uniquely feminist in her aesthetics that needs to be further explored.

Naidu’s poetry marks a transition. For what was to come with emergent nationalism¹ is a revivalism that has a new image of “Savitri” to project. It was the women, their commitment, their purity, their sacrifice who were to ensure the moral, even spiritual power of the nation and hold it together. But even as we point this out, we must not forget that this phase also prepared for a positive evaluation of femininity that did allow for a limited growth. Individual women, especially those who came from families that had risen economically and socially during the colonial regime, were able to develop, to move close to and sometimes even achieve leadership and power. However, the women who emerged from this phase often were vociferous about the traditional role of women, of the need to fulfil domestic demands and the requirements of femininity before moving on to ‘serve the nation’. Again these women, Sarojini being one of them rarely admitted the real oppression of women in our society, for they believed the way out of it was open to any who had the strength and talent to try and of course the virtue to thrive. No doubt partially in response to the British focus on women, Sarojini as a part of the movement decided to create an image of the Indian woman who was not socially victimised, but voluntarily chose the path of suffering and death in order to save her people². Indeed she became a heraldic device.

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2.2 Background and location of Sarojini Naidu : The in-between place.

Naidu's poem as a whole paint the land of 'Romance and Mystery', the India of the common western imagination, with its colourful bangle sellers, graceful palanquin bearers and princely Rajput lovers. The definitive taste is British, although the subjects ostensibly are Indian. Significantly, the hub of Naidu's world is a cultured, refined upper class. What happens to women, or for that matter those who work: the weavers, the fishermen, the palanquin bearers within this world? To see them as they are is discomfiting, so they are transformed into a romance that will fit the requirements of European taste, but which at the same time absorbs both suffering and labour into the quietism of its lilting form. If she speaks of a life in 'purdah' as the perfect repose of protection: "... a revolving dream / Of languid and sequestered ease / Her girdles and her fillets gleam / Like changing fires on sunset seas..." (Naidu, Sarojini *The Sceptered Flute* 53), she sees the weavers as participating in the colourful, cyclic dance of life, the palanquin bearers' work as a joyful gesture; their burden weightless. "Gaily, O gaily we glide and we sing / We bear her long like a pearl on a string" (*The Sceptered Flute* 3). Again in "Dirge" we find a romantic justification of tonsuring and stripping the young widow of her jewels. One can go on, but the point has been made. Naidu's burden is to project, to explain, to justify, just as much as to show around. That this makes for a distortion of the landscape and of those who inhabit it is evident. But it also makes for the peculiar formation of the Indian intellectual engaged in this relation. Not only must one remain servile to another order, one must erase, and will gradually grow to hate, all which cannot be moulded into that cultural form. This bears out the tortuous psycho-cultural situations for the Indians due to colonial presence; more so for those who came into contact with it.

Again, colonial presence in India gives rise to Indo-Anglian literature; a literary sub-culture that owes its existence to the British presence in India. One locates this point of origin, precisely because a principal burden of this literature can be regarded a working out of the urgencies that arise from the Indo-British encounter. If we regard culture in its living sense as the forms, institutions, the knowledge that arise as people come to terms with their environment, it is clear that over the past two hundred years or so, our

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culture has grown, and continues to grow against the stunting, even deforming background of European imperialism and colonialism. Existing social and economic structures were crudely broken up and the political system undermined, first by the mercantile incursions of the Company and then by the imperial government. In the process, traditional institutions and values were divested of their vital functions in the society. Along with this came the developments in education and in religious attitudes that changed the cultural structure of that world. What we have come to recognise as Indo-Anglian literature, arises perhaps from the resulting pressures on the bhadralok and especially on those who were close to them.

As a result there was a great mingling of thought between Western and Eastern literary studies in the nineteenth century. Sanskrit was beginning to fascinate many European scholars. Then again, Indians did not stop at merely absorbing English and its rich literature. The developed West “revived the dormant intellectual and critical impulse; it rehabilitated life and awakened the desire of new creation”(Sengupta 75). Bengalis were the first to pick up this impact. At the same time Indians began to criticise the new English culture. Sarojini Naidu, herself a product of the English speaking system of education, deplored that it sold generations of ‘denationalised Indian youth’ into a blind intellectual bondage to the West. But the immense advantages were not ignored. A new stream of literature, based on religious, secular, scientific and humanistic subjects now began to flow into India. A feeling of give and take between the West and the East created a new school of thinking³. Keshub Chander Sen was the leader of this group. Aghornath Chattopadhyay (father of Sarojini) too joined his school, after he returned from abroad and was replete with zest for reforms combined with patriotic fervour. Varada Sundari (mother of Sarojini, who composed Bengali lyrics when young) was also an inmate of the Sen family. Thus Sarojini was brought up in a tradition that was liberal and tolerant of all castes, creeds and races as her parents were associated with one of the most dynamic groups of awakening India. She was taught from earliest childhood to believe in the East-West comradeship.

In 1879 when Sarojini was born Indians were possessed with the dream of writing in English. But the background after her father had moved to Hyderabad was a mixture of Hindu, Islam and British culture. She adopted Western language and Western techniques to express herself; and here Persian

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poetry too had a considerable influence on her. So it can be said that Sarojini was a child of Hindu-Muslim structure of Hyderabad with a strong background of Brahma philosophy of tolerance and love towards humanity and English in her outlook. Truly, Karkala remarked: "Indo-English literature demonstrates the Indian philosophic outlook of unity in rich diversity" (Karkala *Indo-Engtsh Literature* 1). In fact Sarojini's three slender volumes of mystic verses are sprinkled frequently with a deep philosophy of life and otherworldly visions, although critics have found lack of philosophical depth as a major fault with Sarojini's poetry.

While surveying the nature of her poetic project and how it was shaped by the dominant ideological structures of her time we can appreciate the inner tensions and conflicts in her poetry. In a way it can be said that Sarojini's poetry was a rich and complex text, which reproduced the contradictions and debates of her age. Gosse, her first critic and also her literary mentor, gave her the choice between being a "machine-made imitator" and a "genuine Indian poet of the Deccan". James Cousins, one of her earliest critics accused her of 'illogic' and 'excess'. Lotika Basu, went further and criticised her poetry as 'inauthentic' and 'unrealistic'. In her book on *Indian English Poetry* she made quite a caustic observation:

"In Mrs. Naidu's treatment of Indian subject she does not give a realistic picture of India; She merely continues the picture of India painted by Anglo-Indian and English writers, a land of bazaars, full of bright colours and perfumes and peopled with picturesque beggars, wandering minstrels and snake charmers.... She is more intent on drawing an interesting picture of India than on representing India as it is. It is this, which makes her verses rather disappointing... Mrs. Naidu has failed in becoming a true interpreter of India to the West" (Basu 94-95).

It had been a commonplace assumption that Sarojini's poetry was imitative of British romantic poets. There is no doubt that her poetry bears the stamp of British lyricism. Sarojini herself identified Sir Walter Scott as the model for her juvenile poem *Mehir Muneer*⁴. Gosse mentioned the influence of Shelley and Tennyson. Many later critics have located her sources in the poetry of the Pre-Raphaelites. Yet the exact nature of these varied influence have never been worked out, nor exacting scholarship has ever backed such claims. To achieve a definite conclusion on the question of the influences on Sarojini, her poetry needs to be worked out with more precision and accuracy.

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Padmini Sengupta in her illustrative writing commented: Sarojini wrote highly colourful poems in English, but they were the poems of India. She “lived and exulted in living in India” (77). If she had not felt the ‘throbs of drums and cymbals’, the ‘lilt of folk songs’; if she had not heard the ‘street vendors cries’ and had she not sensed the ‘boatman’s simple way of life floating across the blank river’; if she had not lived with ‘the glamorous, the exotic beauties of the secluded *Purdah-Nashin*’ world, she could never have produced such exquisite lyrics. It was this romantic world of India which she presented with delight to the English reader. She was proud of India. She adored serving and loving her land in which she rejoiced and this beloved land she would interpret abroad. India was a conquered country when Sarojini was writing. She wished to raise the status of her motherland before other nations. She lavished in praise of her motherland and deliberately curtailed the faults and shortcomings that it had. The ugly reality and sordid attitudes of life were never her inspiration. She once said: “England had reached greatness because they never admitted their faults. Why should we, when we still had to build up our country into a free and forceful land?” (*Sarojini Naidu* 78). This proves Sengupta right when she remarked, “No one ... could have been more national or patriotic than Sri Aurobindo or Sarojini Naidu, to quote but a few Indo-Anglian poets” (79).

2.3 Influence on Sarojini : Contradictory criticisms

Again it is interesting to note that when in England, at the age of sixteen, Sarojini moved freely not only in the company of Symons, Gosse and other poets and critics of the day, but with many of the members of the ‘Rhymers Club’. There she perhaps learnt to be ‘word perfect’. From there she certainly acquired “the verbal and technical accomplishment, the mastery of phrase and rhythm, without which she could not have translated her visions and experiences into melodious poetry” (Iyengar *Indian Writing In English* 209). Many of her poems are pilgrimages, visions and dreams to the realms of love, faith, patriotism and freedom. These were spontaneous and intensely passionate experiences of the poet written at the mystic moment when she wrote ‘short swallow-flights of song’ and where she was most successful. She did not strive to form a consecutive sequence of poetic thought. When she

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Padmini Sengupta in her illustrative writing commented: Sarojini wrote highly colourful poems in English, but they were the poems of India. She “lived and exulted in living in India” (77). If she had not felt the ‘throbs of drums and cymbals’, the ‘lilt of folk songs’; if she had not heard the ‘street vendors cries’ and had she not sensed the ‘boatman’s simple way of life floating across the blank river’; if she had not lived with ‘the glamorous, the exotic beauties of the secluded *Purdah-Nashin*’ world, she could never have produced such exquisite lyrics. It was this romantic world of India which she presented with delight to the English reader. She was proud of India. She adored serving and loving her land in which she rejoiced and this beloved land she would interpret abroad. India was a conquered country when Sarojini was writing. She wished to raise the status of her motherland before other nations. She lavished in praise of her motherland and deliberately curtailed the faults and shortcomings that it had. The ugly reality and sordid attitudes of life were never her inspiration. She once said: “England had reached greatness because they never admitted their faults. Why should we, when we still had to build up our country into a free and forceful land?” (*Sarojini Naidu* 78). This proves Sengupta right when she remarked, “No one ... could have been more national or patriotic than Sri Aurobindo or Sarojini Naidu, to quote but a few Indo-Anglian poets” (79).

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tried to form any philosophical plan, as in 'The Temple: A Pilgrimage of Love', striving to intermingle the divine and human love of a woman offering herself in utter self-denial, she did not convince the reader. It is more persuasive to argue that Sarojini's poetic range was, as she herself acknowledged, essentially limited. She had command over a small territory and a particular lyrical style. She never attempted anything really ambitious. Later other things claimed her time and attention; poetry was lost to oratory. In a letter to Arthur Symonds⁵, Sarojini wrote:

I am not a poet really. I have the vision and desire, but not the voice. If I could write just one poem full, of beauty and the spirit of greatness, I should be exultingly silent forever; but I sing just as the birds do, and my songs are as ephemeral (quoted in The Golden Threshold 10).

It had often been remarked that Sarojini's poetry is superficial, that it lacked a philosophical content. True, the vivid portraiture of human reality that many poets of her age so often drew is not present here. The words in T.S. Eliot. Eliot's *Gerontion* are conversational, that really take the reader into his confidence. Such pictures Sarojini seemed to have failed to depict even in her dialogue with death. Sarojini's flight songs too are always somehow never quite real in life. The poet herself contributed to such an impression by her deliberate emphasis on 'fleeting' and 'momentary'. I presume nowhere else in Indian English poetry such celebration of mutability and transience can be found. The image of the singing bird, soaring up or fluttering on its broken wings recurred in her poetry and this is where she excels. Again, in the light of *alankara shastra*, which deals with the key aspects of classical Indian aesthetics or the 'beautiful form' in Indian poetry, we can identify Sarojini as primarily a poet of ornamentation and beautiful forms. "Every line, every idea, every image is embellished elaborately in her poetry" (Paranjape 17). Of course this leads to the problem of 'excess' that I shall discuss subsequently.

Sarojini Naidu's celebration of the 'fleeting present', evident in her 'spring poems', is an important group of poems in her oeuvre after her love songs. It is here she sorts the problems of 'transience' and 'immortality'. For her transience is the proof of immortality because even death is transient. Salvation for Sarojini is here and now, in life on earth, not in repudiation or denial of the world of senses.

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But in its excess of enthusiasm towards a compact style, she had gone to the extreme of eliminating romantic expressions from her poetry. The dissolution of the centre through a keen sensual experience was her idea of emancipation. Her senses were her source of ecstasy and life was the stimulant; often she forced both the stimulants and the senses beyond their capacities in her attempt to reach her 'high'. In this she was not just a romantic, but also a believer in the cult of sensibility. She believed in the soul, not one which was transcendental and which could only be recreated through a repression and denial of the senses, but a soul, which worked through the senses. This is possibly why it was said, that a "particular verbal mode of expressing romantic sensibility had ended with Sarojini Naidu and her generation ... the neo-symbolists have evolved their own characteristic idiom for expressing 'romantic' sensibility" (Gokak xxxv-vi). The capacity to feel, to experience, to be one with life was crucial to her. And she compulsively sought for a heightening of this capacity repeatedly and feverishly almost like an addict. Hence, the element of exaggeration and excess in her poetry for which she received enormous adverse criticism.

As a poet and a philosopher Sarojini Naidu is often compared to Sri Aurobindo. Both Sri Aurobindo and Sarojini Naidu had spent their impressionable years in England when the 'Decadent' poets dominated the scene. Sarojini Naidu modelled her poetic style on these lines and followed to her very last days. Her poems are full of jewelled phrases. But Sri Aurobindo very soon outgrew the manner and blazed a new trail in poetry that many were to follow. This could be the reason why modernist critics were inclined to club them together and also dismissed them with identically facile gestures. Sri Aurobindo was an intellectual and philosophical poet. "He was a prophet of Life ... He believed in the inevitable transformation of humanity into a race of higher beings and worked for it" (Gokak xxxi). He used his poetry as a vehicle for this well-thought-out ideological project and wrote several books of poems. He wrote long poems like *Savitri*, a poem of over 24,000 lines, as he had so much to say through the poem. Sarojini in contrast had so little to say that she wrote very little and mostly in the lyric mode. Nor did she intend to write grand or profound poems meant to be classics. This does not mean that Naidu was a superficial poet, or that she did not have any philosophy to convey through her poetry. On the contrary, her very refusal to philosophise was itself a part of her philosophy. The spontaneous and

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2.4 On Sarojini's Books of Poem—with reviews

Sarojini's most appreciated collection of poems was *The Golden Threshold*⁶. The poems in it belong almost wholly to two periods: 1896 and 1904. The poems included in it are on a wide range of subjects. One of them is an invocation to India; another is addressed to the Buddha. Some of the poems are personal others are philosophical or reflective. There is a wide range of nature poetry. Several pieces in this volume show Sarojini's deep feeling for the Islamic tradition in Indian culture. But the majority of poems in this volume are about the people of India engaged in their daily vocations.

Arthur Symons who was responsible for the publication of this book said: "As they seemed to me to have an individual beauty of their own, I thought they ought to be published" (*Paranjape Prose and Poetry* 5). In his introduction to the book Symons wrote: "Her poetry seems to sing itself, as if her swift thoughts and strong emotions sprang into lyrics of themselves". The Glasgow Herald praised, "The pictures are of East, it is true; but there is something fundamentally human in them that seems to prove that the best song knows nothing of East and West". The Manchester Guardian paid a glowing tribute: "It is a considerable delight to come across such genuine poetry as is contained in *The Golden Threshold*. Its simplicity suggests Blake, it is always musical, its eastern colour is fresh and its firm touch is quick and delicate"(All the reviews are collected from Tilak Raghukul *Sarojini Naidu, Selected Poems* 23). This made Sarojini a celebrity in both India and England. Never before had a book of poems by an Indian caused such a stir abroad. First published in 1905, it was reprinted in quick succession in 1906, 1909, 1914 and 1916. That such a young Indian girl could produce a best-selling book of poems in an adopted language was definitely a remarkable

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accomplishment. Her famous poem 'To a Buddha seated on a Lotus' was included from this book in "*Oxford Book of English Mystic Verse*", including her in the list of the greatest of English poets. The 'Modern Muse' reprinted the above poem. The Review of Reviews wrote: "This little volume should silence for ever the scoffer who declares that women cannot write poetry" (*Indian Writing in English* 214). *The Golden Threshold* remained as Sarojini's best and most popular book and she never quite exceeded what she achieved in it.

J.B. Yeats called her a 'pure romantic'. True, her world was of romance rather than the stark realities of life. Although she had made use of many poignant customs and tragic events in her second volume of poems, there was always something unrealistic about her lyrics. Nevertheless "she possess[ed] her qualities in heaped measures", observed *The Bookman* (*Indian Writing in English* 217). The reviewers greeted the second volume of poems, *The Bird of Time*, as enthusiastically as the earlier volume. "She has more than a profusion of beautiful things", wrote Edward Thomas in the Daily Chronicle. The Yorkshire Post acknowledged: "Mrs Naidu has not only enriched our language but has enabled us to grow into intimate relation with the spirit, the emotions, the mysticism and the glamour of the East" (*Indian Writing in English* 217). It is interesting to observe, Edmund Gosse, who was apprehensive of her first volume of poems, wrote the introduction to *The Bird of Time*, published by William Heinemann in 1912⁷. He remarked that there was discernible in it "a graver music" than in the earlier volume. John Lane also published it simultaneously in New York.

The poems in the volume were songs of 'life' and 'death'; the dualities of life and death. Life was often brightly painted, but death's shadows crept or lingered. There were love-songs as well as elegies. 'Spring' inspired her to song, but even as she thrilled at the thought of the festival of spring, her compassionate heart rued the plight of the Hindu widow who had no part in the festive ceremonials. The Book was reviewed widely as Sarojini by then was an established poet. Gosse in his introduction wrote: "If the poems of Sarojini Naidu be carefully and delicately studied, they will be found as luminous in lighting up the dark places of the East as any contribution of any savant or historians" (Tilak 24). *The Bird of Time*, "like Galsworthy's *Cethru* is impartial and sings gay and sad songs alike...of life and death, joy and pain and the music is 'graver', but yet no chord has snapped" (Iyengar 217). A

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much later critic, Paranjape, commented: "Her readers in England expected both beauty and oriental glamour from her and she did not disappoint them". (*Selected Poetry And Prose* 6)

The change in note, however, became sharper in Sarojini's Naidu's third collection, *The Broken Wing*. William Heinemann published this book in 1917. The book was dedicated "to the dream of today and hope of tomorrow" (Tilak 25). Both the hope and dream were about the future of India. At the same time some of the pieces in the collection conveyed her personal losses, disappointments and longings. 'In Salutation to My Father's Spirit' (who died in February 1915) was one such poem. The title of the book was taken from a remark made by G.K. Gokhale. Surprised at the tone of sadness in Sarojini's poems he exclaimed: "why should a song bird like you have a broken wing?" Her reply to Gokhale is contained in the opening poem of the collection, *The Broken Wing*:

*Shall spring that wakes mine ancient land again
Call to my wild and suffering heart in vain?
Or Fate's blind arrows still the pulsing note
Of my far-reaching, frail, unconquered throat?
Or a weak bleeding pinion daunt or tire
My flight to the high realms of my desire?
Behold! I rise to meet the destined spring
And scale the stars upon my broken wing !*

She believed that 'Fate's blind arrows' would not silence her 'unconquered throat'. And she was determined to scale the stars and meet the spring in spite of a 'weak, bleeding pinion'. Yet the poems in the book were strewn with suggestions of a sudden distress that had overwhelmed the poet. Or else, why the poet should give such an account of herself? Even the coming of 'Spring' gave no solace to her. This was the last collection to be published in her lifetime. She lived for another thirty-two years, but as a poet she ceased to be. It was not because she suddenly realised that one should write in one's mother tongue and that she did not have the requisite mastery of it. Nor was it because she realised that her poetic language was quite unequal to the demands made upon it by a real poetic inspiration. It was not even because of her entry into politics, for she had been in it for over ten years without damaging her poetic inspiration. In Europe, the first wave of

much later critic, Paranjape, commented: "Her readers in England expected both beauty and oriental glamour from her and she did not disappoint them". (*Selected Poetry And Prose* 6)

The change in note, however, became sharper in Sarojini's Naidu's third collection, *The Broken Wing*. William Heinemann published this book in 1917. The book was dedicated "to the dream of today and hope of tomorrow" (Tilak 25). Both the hope and dream were about the future of India. At the same time some of the pieces in the collection conveyed her personal losses, disappointments and longings. 'In Salutation to My Father's Spirit' (who died in February 1915) was one such poem. The title of the book was taken from a remark made by G.K. Gokhale. Surprised at the tone of sadness in Sarojini's poems he exclaimed: "why should a song bird like you have a broken wing?" Her reply to Gokhale is contained in the opening poem of the collection, *The Broken Wing*:

*Shall spring that wakes mine ancient land again
Call to my wild and suffering heart in vain?
Or Fate's blind arrows still the pulsing note
Of my far-reaching, frail, unconquered throat?
Or a weak bleeding pinion daunt or tire
My flight to the high realms of my desire?
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modernism was beginning to gather momentum. There was about to be a cataclysmic change in the poetic fashion. Sarojini was swept aside by this tide. There was considerable criticism of her limitations too as a poet. Dr. Shankar Mokashi Punekar even went to the extent of saying, "For a practising poet, to write on Sarojini Naidu with an old-world enthusiasm is a business liability" (*Indian Writing in English* 223).

Yet, Naidu did not stop. She continued writing her verse from time to time even when she was in the thick of India's struggle for independence. These lyrics were collected and edited by her daughter Padmaja Naidu and were published twelve years after her death by Asia Publishing House in 1961. When this last book of poems, *The Feather of the Dawn* was published, modernism was the ruling mode in Indian poetry. The poet Nissim Ezekiel panned the book among others and Sarojini had been 'consigned to oblivion'. He wrote: "The English encouraged by Gosse granted Sarojini Naidu a season or two of favour and then dropped her irrevocably into oblivion" (*Sarojini Naidu: Nightingale of India* 59). Thus we can say that her reputation was at its highest from 1905-1907 and declined afterwards. In India she continued to have a following until her death. But in the 1950s when modernism took over Indian English poetry, her reputation as a poet dipped to the lowest.

Much before the modernists had put Sarojini's poetry to the "back lobby", Lotika Basu had despised her verses as 'inauthentic', 'unrealistic' and 'disappointing'. Her further criticism, "Talented and with not a little of the gift of the true poet, ..." (*Prose And Poetry II*) was even more spurning. But the poet, who was living then, seemed to be far too satisfied with her already tried out and over-exhausted forms of writing. Where she tried her new style and technique, it was not a success. Her themes, after a while became cut and dried, and her ornate adjectives, though reached a height, resembling to a point those used by early Sanskrit poets, were over emphasised with almost uncontrolled effusion. Most of her poems had repetitive, formulaic structure. The stanzas were almost identical in form and rhyme scheme; only the images and words were changed. Such a structure was found in the 'roundel', a literary form popular in the poetry of the 1890's England. Its key features that included a simple rhyme scheme and refrains, were found in many of Sarojini's poetry. Similarly, one could find in her poetry the penchant for mood, music and dreamy ephemerality, which was common in the 1890s

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poets who were reacting to the high seriousness and moral questioning of the Victorian poets.

2.5 Sarojini's Favourite Poets of The West

To name a few of the poets of the 1890s were, A.C. Swineburn, W. B. Yeats, Edmund Gosse, Edwin Arnold, William Watson, Arthus Symons, John Davidson. With no hesitation it can be said that save for Yeats and Swineburn, most were considered as minor poets. "They were all associated with the Decadents, a group of French and English writers of the late nineteenth century, whose work is marked by an over-refinement of style, cultivated artificiality and abnormality of content. Sarojini imbibed her aesthetics from them. She never changed her style and was to all appearances, indifferent to the storm of modernism that swept across Europe in the 1920s" (Paranjape *Letters* xxv). Yet, she was not unaware of Yeats and his greatness as a poet. Sarojini identified his genius very early and had even written a poem, "Alul"⁸, on him. In a letter to Yeats, she congratulated him on his success in England. She called him "the most subtle and delicate poet of modern Britain" (November 16, 1912). Again it is interesting to observe the role she played, although inadvertently, in the creation of literary modernism. She helped Ezra Pound in his acquisition of the famous 'Fenollosa Papers'⁹ in 1913, which we all know is the source of many of his ideas about the central ity and function of the image of poetry. When Pound was invited to the house of the 'Indian Nationalist Poet Sarojini Naidu', she helped to arrange the meeting between Mrs. Fenollosa and Pound during which the former handed over the papers to the later in her presence.

2.6 Conclusion : General

Thus situated, Sarojini's poetry became a rich and complex text reproducing the contradictions and debates of her age. The general tendency was "to denigrate Sarojini Naidu as no poet at all, or rather as a bad poet" (Iyengar 223). This was perhaps because she did not write like Eliot, Pound or Yeats or like Rabindranath Tagore or Sri Aurobirido. True Sarojini's poetry occupied a very limited realm of lyricism and was deliberately ephemeral thematically. Her indisputable metrical felicity and technical ma'stery had not prevented

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some of her poems sounding like childish jingles. But the wide array of opposing and sometimes complimentary forces that permeates her poetry made her verses a rich subject of study under the banner of Indo Anglian poetry. Thus, “while it is easy not to take seriously the adoring and cloying praise of her contemporaries and admirers, it is equally necessary not to swing to the other extreme in dismissing her out of hand” (*Selected Poetry And Prose* 4).

As Paranjape puts it, Sarojini’s poetry mediates between the ‘forces of the English poetic tradition and her Indian sensibility’; between ‘the politics of nationalism and the aesthetics of feudalism’; between ‘the overwhelming power of modernity and the nostalgia for a threatened tradition’; between ‘the security of a comfortable patriarchy and liberating power of the women’s movement’. Thus Sarojini’s verses undoubtedly displayed both resistance to and cooptation by the dominant ideology of her time, which was colonialism. But unluckily Sarojini was unable to liberate her poetry from these contradictions. Unlike Tagore, her work remained mired in them. This made Sarojini a particularly soft target to the modernist. To them not only did she represent a dead aesthetic, but also her romanticism was of a ‘particularly meretricious kind’. At the same time she was condemned of her low intellectual range, compared to Rabindranath Tagore or Sri Aurobindo.

2.7 Assessment

Nevertheless, I feel Sarojini Naidu, both in her own right and as a representative of her times, deserves to be remembered and studied. She was one of those whose greatness is most difficult to identify and substantiate. In her life converge some of the dominant cultural, social and political currents of pre-independence India. As one of the principal aides and followers of Mahatma Gandhi, she was constantly in the limelight and probably the best-known Indian woman of her time. She also had an international presence as India’s cultural ambassador and spokesperson of the freedom movement. Her unusual energy that contributed to an extraordinary public presence was both dynamic and catalytic. And as a poet, like a true woman of India, she represented herself and the experiences of her fellow Indians. Her India was more artificial, exotic and picturesque, but less mysterious, alien or fraudulent than any account by an Anglo-Indian poet. She knew her India better than

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a foreigner. Even if the poetic programme and its aesthetics were borrowed, the control over the representation was in native land. Her poetry illustrates both a collusion with and a resistance to the dominance of the 'metropolitan aesthetics'. The inner tensions and conflicts in her poetry are well appreciable.

The praises, undoubtedly, had become lukewarm after the onslaught of the 1950s; yet her poetry throughout has remained, popular. And amongst the whole generation of poets and poet-makers she has remained one of the most widely-anthologised and studied of Indian English poets. A closer look into her poems will give a wider impression about Sarojini Naidu as 'a poet of contradiction'.

2.8 Notes

1. It is interesting to note that much of her verse dates back to the period before her involvement with the Congress party.
2. Look, poem 'Suttee' of Sarojini Naidu. In the poem the widow is distraught "Love must I dwell in the living dark? ... Shall the blossom live when the tree is dead? Sati (widow immolation) seems the only real answer.
3. Devendranath Tagore and Keshub Chunder Sen worked together for ten years and created a strong cult out of the Brahmo religion which Raja Ram Mohun Roy had started in 1828; but Keshub Chunder's teachings were based more and more on Christian ideals and forms and emerged as a separate branch from the original Brahmo Samaj. Keshub Chunder Sen's branch was called the 'Naba Bidhan'.
4. Sarojini's poetic career began when she was just eleven. Arthur Symons quotes her in his Introduction to *The Golden Threshold*: One day, when I was eleven, I was sighing over a sum in algebra: it wouldn't come right; but instead a whole poem came to me suddenly. I wrote it down. From that day my 'poetic career' began. At thirteen I wrote a long poem a la "*Lady of the Lake*"— 1300 lines in six days. (When published in 1893, it came to be known as "*Mehir Muneer*").
5. This letter is quoted in Symon's introduction to *The Golden Threshold*.
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7. Read introduction to *The Bird Of Time*, 4-5; can also refer to Paranjape's introduction to *Selected Prose And Poetry*.
8. 'Alul', is an unpublished poem. Available in Sarojini Naidu Paper, Nehru Memorial Library. The poem dated 15 may 1896, is enclosed in a letter to Govandarajulu. She explains, "It is about Yeats... Alul is the name of a mystic dreamer like Mr. Yeats himself..."The poem: He is a Druid-Child of mystic dreams/
In the dim twilight of deep Celtic woods/
He maketh music in wild, wayword moods/
Of fairy fantasy by starry streams. /
He bears a red rose twined on his lyre/
His eyes are dark and prophet-like with fire, Alul his name — of fays I did inquire.
9. See J. J. Wilhem, *Ezra Pound in London and Paris: 1908-1925* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1990).



7. Read introduction to *The Bird Of Time*, 4-5; can also refer to Paranjape's introduction to *Selected Prose And Poetry*.
8. 'Alul', is an unpublished poem. Available in Sarojini Naidu Paper, Nehru Memorial Library. The poem dated 15 may 1896, is enclosed in a letter to Govandarajulu. She explains, "It is about Yeats... Alul is the name of a mystic dreamer like Mr. Yeats himself..."The poem: He is a Druid-Child of mystic dreams/
In the dim twilight of deep Celtic woods/
He maketh music in wild, wayword moods/
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2.9 Village Song : An Analysis

Honey, child, honey, child, whither are you going?
Would you cast your jewels all to the breezes blowing?
Would you leave the mother who on golden grain has fed you?
Would you grieve the lover who is riding forth to wed you?

- 5 Mother mine, to the wild forest I am going,
Where upon the *champa* boughs the *champa* buds are blowing;
To the koil-haunted river-isles where lotus lilies glisten,
The voices of the fairy-folk are calling me, O listen!

Honey, child, honey, child, the world is full of pleasure,

- 10 Of bridal-songs and cradle-songs and sandal-scented leisure
Your bridal robes are in the loom, silver and saffron glowing,
Your bridal cakes are on the hearth: O whither are you going?

The bridal-songs and cradle-songs have cadences of sorrow,
The laughter of the sun today, the wind of death tomorrow.

- 15 Far sweeter sound the forest-notes where forest-streams are falling;
O mother mine, I cannot stay, the fairy-folk are calling.

A considerable analysis of Sarojini Naidu in the previous section only contributes towards further specific study of her poetry that focus on her personality and the force that created the impact that she was remembered for. She recognised her own role in public life as that of bringing a poetic flavour to the otherwise drab business of social and political work. Conversely, she was perhaps the most effective purveyor of the sublime, transforming public speaking into poetry. It was with *The Golden Threshold* in 1905 that Sarojini's career as a poet took off. This book of poems received fine notices in British press although she herself described her verses as "my poor casual little poems,... which seem less than beautiful" (Naidu, Sarojini 129).

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It is said that the best of Sarojini's poetry is the result of her folk inspiration. Poems of this genre are characterised by directness, immediacy,

simplicity and lilting melody. 'Village Song' is one such folk poem included in the collection, *The Golden Threshold*. It is a representation of a pretty guileless life of a village girl in harmony with nature. It can be said that the social order in which she lives is an extension of the natural order. She intently feels that her correspondence with nature will make her life more serene and carefree and refuses to experience the superficiality of the artificial grandeur of this worldly life. In such a moment of dejection she enjoys and praises the music of the 'forest-streams' more than the 'bridal-songs' and 'cradle-songs' and takes refuge in the lap of nature. She discovers that the suffering, which marks human life, does not interrupt nature's marvellous rhythm. In terms of logical consistency it may seem self-contradictory to praise the harmony between man and nature and also to bemoan the deficiencies of human life which nature can correct. But Sarojini is not disturbed by this consideration. She experiences a deep feeling of kinship and communion with nature.

A close reading of the poem would explain the context and subtext or implication of this poem. Such an approach would clarify the absences in Sarojini's text as an example of overwhelmingly harsh reality of colonialism which the poem seeks to repress and as if banish outside itself. It is as if the poet prefers not to confront reality.

Naturally in this poem 'Village song' integrated into the Folksongs¹ of the collection, a fascination for social customs and prejudices can be observed. Not just the subject, the language too reflects her aesthetic predilections or her fondness for visual effect. The more ornate, more latinate, more exotic more unusual words or phrase like 'honey', 'whither', 'cadences' 'fairy-folks', is preferred over the simple, functional and ordinary. This leads to a heightening of sensuality in the imagery until every sense is stimulated into excess. Visually, the images of the village girl tend away from clear daylight and sharp focus to hazy, dream-like, blurred states of experience.

The choice before the adolescent girl is between two versions of romanticism. One is the more domestic and less exotic choice of a sequestered and luxurious married life; the other is the more exotic and romantic escape to the 'wild forest' where the 'fairy-folk' are calling her. Predictably, the girl chooses the latter. So the mother seeks to counter the romantic escape-world imagined by the girl with a romantic picture of the world she inhabits. But the daughter keeps to her own decision and explains her own irresistible fidelity to the charm of the fairy world. In other words the relationship

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between human life and the moods of nature are hinted in the poem “in a sort of delicately evasive way, at a rare temperament, the temperament of a woman of the East, finding expression through a Western language... [but] there is an Eastern magic in them” (Symons introduction to Golden Threshold. 23 Naravane). There is a common stream of life, a rhythmic power, which animates both nature and man. And the continuity between the natural and the human is expressed in many ways in this poem and human ideals are projected upon natural phenomenon. These projections do not remain distant. They come close and close and the poetess seem to participate in their life. For her nature can correct the deficiencies of human life, as there is a deep communion between the soul of nature and the soul of the girl, a representation of human being as a whole. For Sarojini, the life of nature reveals accord rather than discord, beauty and love rather than distortion or strife. The poem ‘Village Song’ therefore becomes an example of Naidu’s aesthetics of excess.

Thus the theme ‘the search of the finite for the infinite’ finds its validation and explication in the form of a dialogue between the mother and the daughter in the poem ‘Village Song’. The daughter wants to escape from the sorrow and suffering of the real and the present into the romantic world of nature as for her “The laughter of the sun today, [is] the wind of death tomorrow”. But the mother requests her repetitively as. the more “urgent and intimate need” of the sensitive maiden’s personality cannot be understood by her who nurtures her own sense of loss and separation, and it is here the poem starts. She asks her where she is going throwing away all her jewellery into the wind that is blowing. Would she leave her mother alone who has fed her on ‘golden grains’ with all her love and affection? Would she ‘grieve’ or break the heart of the lover who is coming on horseback to marry her?

*Honey*², child, honey, child, whither are you going?

Would you cast³ your jewels all to the breezes blowing?

Would you leave the mother who on golden grain⁴ has fed you?

Would you grieve the lover who is riding forth to wed you?

The daughter however would not give in. Sickened with the harshness of the mundane world she is determined to go away to the beautiful forests, where the ‘koils’ sing all day through and where the sweet scented ‘champa’ flowers and the ‘lotus’ and ‘lilies’ in their full bloom are shining in all their beauties.

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The fairies are calling her to this beautiful forest. She pin her ears back and being enticed to their call she invites her mother as well to listen.

Mother mine, to the wild forest I am going,
Where upon the *champa* boughs the *champa* buds are blowing;
To the *koil* haunted⁵ river-isles where lotus lilies glisten⁶,
The voices of the fairy-folk are calling me, O listen!

Nevertheless, the mother continues her attempts to counter the escape world of her daughter and tries to tempt her to her own world of fulfilment. The world is full of pleasures, there are sweet lullabies and sweet marriage songs and there is also plenty of leisure and fragrance of sandalwood. The bridal dress, bright and beautiful, in 'silver' and 'saffron' colours is being prepared; the delicious, gorgeous 'bridal-cakes' are also ready. So she asks her not to go away leaving behind all these pleasures, causing intense sorrow to her mother and to her would be husband.

Honey, child, honey, child, the world is full of pleasure,
Of bridal-songs and cradle-songs and sandal-scented leisure⁷.
Your bridal robes are in the loom, silver⁸ and saffron glowing,
Your bridal cakes are on the hearth: O whither are you going?

The daughter is not to be stopped yet. The calls of the fairies are much more powerful. It is fascinating to her than all the worldly grandeur. She frankly tells her mother that the pleasures of this world are short-lived. 'Bridal songs' and 'cradle songs' have an undercurrent of sorrow, and the pleasures she refers to are all fleeting. The sunshine of joy is darkened in no time by the blind wind of death. The songs of the forest, in contrast, are sweeter and are far more lasting. So she must go for the fairies are calling her and enjoy the sweet music of the birds and the streams.

The bridal-songs and cradle-songs have cadences⁹ of sorrow,
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It may seem in vain to look for sustained excellence in this lyric with continuous repetition. A decline in quality becomes naturally obvious. In such a brief poem of four stanzas recurrence of same images makes the poem a little dull than persuasive. Moreover, it is said, this deficiency is not 'compensated by profundity of thought'. Sarojini was perhaps aware of this deficiency and that is why she described her own poems as 'ephemeral'. Nonetheless, she has succeeded in capturing the simplicity, rhythm and the spirit of a folk song. At the same time a symbolic significance and a rich texture having layers of meaning, in between the dialogues, gives a vivid and forceful expression of the human heart for the remote, the distant and the unfamiliar world, which is not subject to the fluctuations of the human joys and sorrows, which is eternally beautiful and sweet. This the poet does with her exceptional metrical skill, which immediately impresses a reader to appreciate.

Thus it can be said that the 'Village Song' is a highly reflective poem of a sensitive mind. Its roots are predominantly affective or sentimental rather than cognitive. But there is nothing in the poem that can lead us to question her sincerity or suspect that she has been deliberately exaggerating. She expresses her sentiments with true intensity and passion. "Her India may be more artificial, exotic and picturesque, but less mysterious, alien or dishonest than any account by an Anglo-Indian poet" (Paranjape 12)

Of course there are many critics of Sarojini who take for granted that a poet who is enchanted by the rhythmic flow of Indian life is dwelling in an unreal world, which does not correspond to the realities of Indian life. It would be untrue to say that Sarojini was unfamiliar with the actual life of the Indian people. Having spent a lot of time in rural areas she acquired first-hand knowledge of every aspect of Indian life including the sufferings of the Indian people. She also saw and felt, behind all poverty and superstition and backwardness, the calmness and simple beauty of Indian life, its amazing continuity and assimilative power. If Sarojini Naidu's poems reflect the gentle and enchanting sides of India's life and landscape, it is "not because she was ignorant of the harsher side but simply because her creative powers were quickened by the former than the latter" (Narvane 134).

Closely reading Sarojini's poem, 'Village Song', a central psychological impulse or a fancy for the 'other' world can be observed as in Pre-Raphaelite poetry and the aesthetic effects of that impulse. Such exegesis also enables us

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Closely reading Sarojini's poem, 'Village Song', a central psychological impulse or a fancy for the 'other' world can be observed as in Pre-Raphaelite poetry and the aesthetic effects of that impulse. Such exegesis also enables us

It may seem in vain to look for sustained excellence in this lyric with continuous repetition. A decline in quality becomes naturally obvious. In such a brief poem of four stanzas recurrence of same images makes the poem a little dull than persuasive. Moreover, it is said, this deficiency is not 'compensated by profundity of thought'. Sarojini was perhaps aware of this deficiency and that is why she described her own poems as 'ephemeral'. Nonetheless, she has succeeded in capturing the simplicity, rhythm and the spirit of a folk song. At the same time a symbolic significance and a rich texture having layers of meaning, in between the dialogues, gives a vivid and forceful expression of the human heart for the remote, the distant and the unfamiliar world, which is not subject to the fluctuations of the human joys and sorrows, which is eternally beautiful and sweet. This the poet does with her exceptional metrical skill, which immediately impresses a reader to appreciate.

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to understand more fully the emotional response Sarojini's poetry generates within the reader, as did the Pre-Raphaelite poetry. These crystallize into a distanced perception of the poem as a thing of beauty, which makes use of the sensations and experiences of quotidian reality primarily to withdraw from that reality and create an estranged and static world of art. Of course Sarojini's ruse was no solution; everyone knew that her India was too romantic, too pretty to represent the Indian reality as they knew it. Her India though backward and underdeveloped, has managed to resist the machine age. What Sarojini tries to do is to offer an entry into this unspoiled India. It would be too painful for her to portray India with all the horrors of its poverty, inequality, disease and suffering; if only they were glossed over, then a very attractive image of India would emerge-traditional, vibrant, vivid, colourful and joyous. Moreover, in a period of exponential social and technological change, she could see vanishing before her eyes a way of life that the West had already lost and now pines for. Thus she attempts at offering to Indians a picture of themselves, which they can be proud of. Something that might salvage some of their crippled self-respect as a colonised and humiliated people¹. In this even if the poetic programme and its aesthetics are borrowed, the control over the representation is in native hands. It remains faithful to the form and spirit of Indian Folk song characterised by directness, immediacy, simplicity and lilting melody.

2.9.1 Structure and Style

In this poem 'Village Song'¹², the poet's intoxication of love and joy of life is deeply fused together with the more "urgent and intimate need of the poet-soul for a perfect sympathy with its incommunicable vision, its subtle and inexpressible thought" (Iyengar 211). This the poet does by dramatising the tension between the mother's traditional view of life and the daughter's romantic view of individuality by adopting the folk-idiom, with its concern for social gradation and ritual, to contrast with the highly subjective flavour of the daughter's impulsive temperament.

As a folk lyric 'Village Song' fits naturally into the background of action and sentiment, germane to the racial consciousness. But the mother's sense of loss is outweighed by the "more urgent and intimate need" of the maiden. For Naidu was not the woman to give way altogether to the gnawing regrets

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or paralysing despair. She sensed beauty of nature in its entire colour, in odour, in song and in its rhythmic movement. The panorama of Indian villages fascinated her without end. Hence the girl's thirst for the eternal beauty is reproduced with the lilt and atmosphere of the folk songs with the sentiment and imagery perfectly fitting into each other. At the same time profound awareness of her tradition is tackled with the right rhythm and the internal and terminal rhymes. In fact the appositeness of the sentiments and imagery, admirable poise, economy and an ear and eye for striking rhythm make the poem of four stanzas an evocative one. There is no room for obscurity or profundity here; simplicity and directness are sovereign, and the appeal is for the unfading and the undying.

Again, Sarojini's command over English prosody in this poem is amazing. Even Paul Verghese, who is otherwise critical of her, admires her metrical dexterity and craftsmanship. Tilak observes, "Sarojini [is] a great metrical artist with a delicate ear" (76). This is true of 'Village Song' where she has used the dactyle¹³, a metrical foot of three syllables, the first accented and the others unaccented to express the girl's urgency to leave her mother as the 'fairy-folk' are calling her to the land of eternal beauty. But the 'romantic-sentimentality' for which Sarojini is often criticised and the over-opulent imagery in the poem like the lover who is riding forth to wed 'bridal cakes', 'sandal-scented leisure', 'bridal robes ...silver and saffron glowing' blurs the visionary focus and the meaning tend to lose in a cloud of words. Thus the glorification and romanticization of the girl's desire and the mother's description of the world she inhabit becomes suspect in this folksong. They become picturesque, frozen in various thoughts of attraction of the girl's land of escape. This repeated image of her fascination with calls of the fairies leads to a heightening of sensuality in the imagery until all her senses are stimulated to excess, leading to a loss of their effectiveness. Similarly, the repetition of words like 'honey' leads to a loss of meaning at first and then the sound value gradually loses its power of moving us.

Yet this heightening does not veil the symbol of the 'finite's longing to lose itself in the infinite'; the representation and significance of the girl's soul yearning to celebrate the endless variety of nature in all its colours and intoxicating beauty. This is maintained by a visual fluidity of form with a simple rhyme scheme¹⁴ delicately woven into the texture, and tone of the folk song. Like the symbolists Sarojini believed in the soul, but a soul which

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"It was the desire of beauty that made her a poet; her 'nerves of delight' were always quivering at the contact of beauty. Her desire, always, was to be 'a wild free thing of the air like the birds, With a song in my heart'" quoted Arthur Symons in his introduction to '*The Golden Threshold*'. But the desire to describe the abundance of nature repetitively with vivid images and colourful beauty reaches such a height of contravention that at times it fails to produce the evocative effect for which they are intended. Again her fondness for uncommon or archaic words like 'honey', 'whither' in the '*Village Song*' in place of simple and familiar ones that might have served just well, gives a feeling of the unreal

This is perhaps because the Pre-Raphaelites had a considerable bearing upon Sarojini¹⁵. With the Pre-Raphaelites the sensory and even the sensual become idealized, image becomes symbol and physical experience is superseded by mental states as we are thrust deeply into the self-contained emotional worlds of their varied personae. In '*Village Song*' the "real" world, its events and sensations are dwelt upon but ultimately abstracted. It is because life for Sarojini, is not a riddle to be solved; it is a miracle to be celebrated and sung. Its endless variety excites her, its colours dazzle her and its beauty intoxicates her. Thus her response to it is immediate and there is no scope for artificiality. "In this, no doubt, is her weakness, but in this is also her strength. In this is the secret of her perennial youthfulness", observes P.E. Dustoor(88).

Locally and generally the structure of this poem with its central image patterns of sound and sight is dialogic, but there is a dialectical pattern interspersed in it. Contraries proliferate- from the opening word 'Honey' to the opposites like 'grieve' and 'wed', to 'bridal-songs' and 'sorrow', to 'laughter' and 'death'. These include oppositions between despair and hope,

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The movement of the poem as a whole is from the external to the internal, but finally to the eternal that incorporates and reconciles both. A marriage of mind and nature thus occurs by the end of the poem, where imagery of the 'forest-notes', 'forest-streams' symbolizes not only the unity of the external world, but also the unification of the internal with the external. The poem's multifarious oppositions are undercut and unified finally by the musical harmonies in which they are expressed. The girl's soul, the 'internal', is unified with the 'external', the 'nature' and thereby her craving for the perpetual joy is achieved. It needs to be observed here that the 'Village Song'¹⁶ reaches a height of sublimity, with a dexterous tackling of rhythm and tone, theme and structure thus deserving an exclusive place of its own.

'Village Song' is a subtle showpiece of Sarojini's rare characteristic of technical procedure and her thematic concern that interact effectively. But, this distinctiveness, this embodiment, is unfortunately missing in the other two poems I shall discuss below.

2.9.2 Questions :

1. Describe 'Village Song' as an exceptional poetic creation of Sarojini Naidu.
2. The relationship between human life and the moods of nature are hinted in the poem "in a sort of delicately evasive way, at a rare temperament, the temperament of a woman of the East, finding expression through a Western language... [but] there is an Eastern magic in them". Explain with reference to the poem 'Village Song'.
3. The mother's sense of loss is outweighed by the "more urgent and intimate need" of the maiden. Critically analyse the statement.
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5. Describe the unity of Nature and village life in 'Village Song'.
6. Why Sarojini Naidu is still remembered today.
7. Write in short : Sarojini's Poetry in initiative of British romantic poets.

2.9.3 Notes

1. Folk Songs: 'folk songs' are sung in the glory of the common folk particularly in the rural setting; Sarojini Naidu presents beautiful and colourful pictures of every aspect of life of the Indian village folk by fusing together several visual impression.
2. Honey: Sweet or dear.
3. Cast: Throw away.
4. Golden grain: Nourishing food.
5. Koil-Haunted: Frequented by koil birds known for their sweet songs. *Koel* or *Koil* has a special place in Sarojini's poetry. When the 'spring' comes and the mango trees put forth their first blossom, the entire Indian landscape seems to resound with the call of this bird. Hence, Sarojini a sensitive admirer of the sight and sound of nature could not but incorporate such a wonderful feeling in her 'nature poems' or 'folk poems'
6. Lotus lilies glisten: The flowers shines in their full bloom. The unique flower comes first in the hierarchy of Indian flowers. It has been celebrated in Indian poetry, myth and legend since time immemorial and has acquired a far-reaching symbolic significance. It is a symbol of purity and sanctity. Sarojini was deeply fascinated by the associations of the 'lotus' in Indian mythology and art, and this enthrallment is reflected in many of her poems. It is interesting to note that Sarojini's own name denotes 'lotus plant' or 'a lake abounded in lotuses'. Lotus is also a symbol of fortune.
7. Sandal-scented leisure: Leisure passed in fragrant bowers of sandal-wood.
8. Silver: Glittering white, symbolising joys of marriage, but there is a patch of black in it, perhaps denoting that silver with all its shine is not as pure as the shine of a full blossomed Lotus.

5. Describe the unity of Nature and village life in 'Village Song'.
6. Why Sarojini Naidu is still remembered today.
7. Write in short : Sarojini's Poetry in initiative of British romantic poets.

2.9.3 Notes

1. Folk Songs: 'folk songs' are sung in the glory of the common folk particularly in the rural setting; Sarojini Naidu presents beautiful and colourful pictures of every aspect of life of the Indian village folk by fusing together several visual impression.
2. Honey: Sweet or dear.
3. Cast: Throw away.
4. Golden grain: Nourishing food.
5. Koil-Haunted: Frequented by koil birds known for their sweet songs. *Koel* or *Koil* has a special place in Sarojini's poetry. When the 'spring' comes and the mango trees put forth their first blossom, the entire Indian landscape seems to resound with the call of this bird. Hence, Sarojini a sensitive admirer of the sight and sound of nature could not but incorporate such a wonderful feeling in her 'nature poems' or 'folk poems'
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9. Cadences: Rhythm; a note of; an undercurrent of.
10. The laughter of ...today, the wind of death tomorrow. The maiden is aware of the fleeting nature of human joys. Life is bright and beautiful at one moment like the sun, but darkened by the shadow of death the very next moment.
11. To escape the oppressive and overpowering advance of the machine age seemed to be the compelling challenge before Victorian poetry. The poetic medievalism of the *Pre-Raphaelites* was one way of meeting the same need as the search for fresh locales and topics in Browning and Tennyson. In this search of its 'Other', a convenient place for Europe to look was in its vast colonial spaces. But for the natives themselves such a search for Europe's 'Other' was no doubt a cul de sac; for there was no such mysterious soul of India. In fact any such notion of it was itself merely a projection or construction from the keen reality of its absence. In a way it can be said that Sarojini's poems were setting a trap, which was to give to the West the picture of India that the West wished to see. In doing so Sarojini subtly but certainly complicated the apparently simple relationship between of the colonised and the coloniser. But with a good motive too, because she knew her India more than a foreigner would. Her India albeit more artificial and exotic, is less mysterious, dishonest or alien than of any Anglo-Indian poet
12. Ms dt 1896 in NA. entitled, "A Folk Song of the Deccan". Last two stanzas added on 14 December 1903.
13. A dactyl is an element of meter in poetry. In quantitative verse, such as Greek or Latin, a dactyl is a long syllable followed by two short syllables. In accentual verse, such as English, it is a stressed syllable followed by two unstressed syllables.
14. Rhyme Scheme : aabb, aabb ...
15. It has been a common place assumption that Sarojini's poetry is imitative of British romantic poets. There is no doubt that her poetry bears the stamp of British lyricism, albeit the exact nature of this influence has never been worked out. The result is a plethora of possible and suggested influences, often not confined to the romantic poets. Sarojini herself identifies Sir Walter Scott as the model for one of her early poems. Gosse, her literary mentor and first critic, mentions the influences of Shelley and Tennyson. Tumbull speaks of Swineburn among other

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There is a beautiful lake, shining like a 'fire-opal', surrounded by a range of onyx-coloured hills. On the shore of this lake a young woman walks alone. She is slender, ethereal, mysterious, decked in splendid jewels. Her face is illumined by a strong yet indefinite passion, as she walks with a 'slumberous rhythm'. Her leisurely gait seems to convey the cadence of the water. Gradually she moves away from the lake and passing through a luxuriant garden enters a courtyard. Overlooking a courtyard there is a decorated chamber in which several girls, dressed in flimsy silks, are reclining indolently on soft cushions. The air is redolent with the fragrance of incense and vibrant with sounds of music and dance. The denizens of the gem-studded chamber invite the lovely visitor. But she ignores them and walks on.

A corridor, and then a steep stairway, lead her to another room with open windows. Here the life of nature has not been shut out. It is a pleasant but simple room, with subdued colours and soft lights, serene and soothing. The young woman finds it much more attractive than the magnificent chamber she has left behind. Another vision follows. She finds herself in a temple built for the worship of the goddess of Mystery and Dreams." Here she meditates. She hears inner whisperings, which she vaguely recognises as longings for knowledge, beauty and human compassion. But she also becomes aware of the evanescence of earthly

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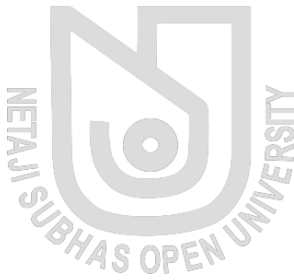
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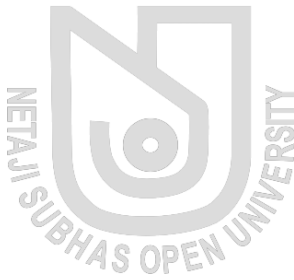
things. She feels within her a burning passion for the Eternal, the Imperishable. The vision breaks. She discovers herself to be a mortal woman with earthly wants. She is sad and sheds tears for the vanished dream of transcendent bliss. What remains is loneliness.

The fantasy shows that even when Sarojini was enjoying the normal life of a contented housewife and was engaged in useful social activities, her imagination continued to transport her to a world of dreams and fancies. But it is not a world of passivity or idle bliss. High ideals and altruistic impulses jostle with love of solitude and hunger for the 'Beyond'. (The outline is taken from Naravane).



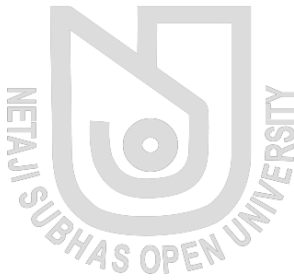
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2.10 If You Call Me : An analysis

If you call me I will come
Swifter, O my Love,
Than a trembling forest deer
Or a panting dove,
Swifter than a snake that flies
To the charmer's thrall . . .
If you call me I will come
Fearless what befall,
If you call me, I will come
Swifter than desire
Swifter than lightning's feet
Shod with plumes of fire.
Life's dark tides may roll between
or Death's deep chasms divide—
If you call me I will come
Fearless what betide.

'If You Call Me', a passionate and rapturous offering of the self to the lover, is a highly reflective poem of Sarojini Naidu where a fascination for the 'sweetness of sorrow' in love and the 'pleasure of pain' reign supreme. The beloved offers her all, for true love implies total self-surrender, and there is an apparent glorification of the beloved's suffering to lose oneself in the Infinite. Such is the paradox of love, that the pleasure of separation is as great as the joy of union. The theme of this poem that love rests on duality, though it seeks unity, is tackled with care with all the charming simplicity and lilting music of a Love song. Again the swiftness of its rhythm wonderfully harmonise to the desire of the beloved for a swift reunion with the lover. But all her efforts are self-generated and the liberating recognition from her lover never comes.

This love poem' is included in Sarojini Naidu's last collection of poetry, *The Broken Wing* (published in 1917 albeit most of the poems were written during the preceding two years). The volume concludes with a series of poems on Love, entitled 'The Temple: A Pilgrimage of Love, a trilogy of lyric sequence of twenty-four poems with eight in each of the three parts: The

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This sequence is said to be Sarojini Naidu's most sustained attempt at defining the various facets of love. Such an approbation of religious symbols for profane love is common in Indian love poetry. The three sections suggest architecture for the sequence resembling that of a temple in which a pilgrim progresses from the gate to the sanctuary. But the tripartite structure is denied in the poems themselves, which do not seem to show any progression at all. I would like to add to the discussion by quoting Dustoor's commentary on this love sequence to give an overall view of the trilogy:

"It reveals a sensitive and passionate spirit, and what is more, strikes a note unfamiliar to readers of English poetry. It is not merely the hyperboles and conceits in it are in the tradition of Oriental rather than English poetry—unless we choose to recall the poetry of the sixteenth and seventeenth century English Metaphysical poets. What I have in mind is rather the spirit and inspiration of Sarojini Naidu's love poetry... [which] could have been written only by a woman, brought up in the Hindu way of life and in the tradition of Hindu love-poetry, religious and secular" (78).

Tilak adds further: "The secular relation between two earthly lovers is raised to the level of the relation of God and Man, to that of the Quest of the finite for the infinite, and thus comes within the province of mystic contemplation" (35). This definitely enriches the tradition of Indian love poetry.

'*If You Call Me*' is the fifth section (lines 56-71) in the first part of the series, *The Gate Of Delight*. It is a passionate and ecstatic submission of the self to the lover as is seen in the Indian love poetry, where suffering is never viewed in a wholly negative light as the sheer opposite of joy. But the poem does not show any morbid enjoyment of agony as is generally observed in the Indian poetic tradition:

If you call me I will come
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Swifter than desire,
Swifter than the lightning's feet
Shod' with plumes of fire.
Life's dark tides⁶ may roll between,
Or death's deep chasms⁷ divide—
If you call me I will come
Fearless what betide⁸.

Here the speaker seems to be trying desperately to revive a moribund or dead love. The section proclaims an undying and lofty love for her lover who remains unmoved. The speaker is severe on herself, often fearless in the hope of drawing the lover's attention. "If you call me, I will come/ Fearless what befall". If her lover calls her she would go to him more swiftly than a frightened deer of the forest running away from the hunter or a dove, which is 'breathless' and 'panting' because of its long flight in the sky. She would come to him more swiftly than does a snake at the call of the snake-charmer. If he calls her, she would come fearlessly, whatever may be the consequences, or whatever may happen to her. Hers is a total surrender to the will of his lover; fear of consequences does not come into her calculation. She is perhaps saying this in the hope of response from her lover. But there is no progression from devotion to the ecstasy of fulfilment or a union with her object of love.

The urgency of the speaker 'if you call me' becomes sadder and rises to a higher scale with repetitive insistence in the next paragraph. The speaker seeks to sacrifice herself completely, to subordinate herself totally to the lover. If her lover calls her, she would fly to him, swifter than desire or thought, swifter even than the lightning that rushes across the sky wearing shoes of feathers or of fire. No obstacles would be able to prevent her. Dark oceans of misfortune may flow in-between them or the wide gulf of death may separate them, even then she would not stop. She pleads again if he calls her, she would come to him without any fear of consequence, or care for the obstacles and difficulties that may beset her path. Here is a love which can brook no delay or difficulty; but to no response.

If you call me. I will come
Fearless what befall⁴.

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The relationship portrayed here, if at all, is an unequal one. One may even go so far as to suggest that it documents the death of a relationship. It seems that the poem is stipulated for the sake of its metaphors and similes and that too gets boring after quite a while. They may adequately convey the rapture of the beloved for which the poet yearns. But it fails to evoke the effect for which they are intended. They remain as mere colourful pictures fusing together several visual impressions. In this connection Lotika Basu's observation is to be noted. She says:

"One gets rather tired of the brilliant metaphors and similes. They introduce an element of artificiality... that wither and die..." (75).

Truly, throughout this lyric, there is an excess or exaggeration of emotion. The speaker is ready to endure any upshot in the hope of drawing her lover's attention. She is even ready to sacrifice herself completely. But the insistence and repetitiveness of this assertion suggest that the surrender is an ideal not a reality; perhaps, it is, even a ruse or strategy to compel some sort of response from the lover. Moreover a sudden inclusion of alliteration almost at the end of the second stanza along with the repetitions strike a false note as it fails to bring a change of pace in harmony with her thought and emotion. The immediacy, the urgency, the intensity, rather suffers a loss of meaning.

The saddest aspect of this section is the sense of ultimate helplessness of the speaker. The beloved offers her all, but all her pains are self-limited and the acknowledgment of the lover never draws closer. It is futile to look for any depth or penetration. The lyric in this sequence is no doubt an expression of passionate feeling, but the idealisation of Love that the poet attempts does not come out successfully beside the sentimentalisation of pervasive masculine domination and the abject surrender of womanhood which she seems to advocate them.

2.10.1 Structure and Style

The poet in this lyric, as in the whole sequence, is bold and forthright to express the sincerity and intensity of her passion. She succeeds as well in conveying her willingness to sacrifice her 'all' for her Love, save for the criticism that caused quite a stir when it was first published. It is also to be noted here that its catchphrase, *If you call me, I will come*, has been repeated four times in such a brief poem. Could be the repetitions along with the bold

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and direct method called for all sorts of rumours which were quite damaging. It went to the extent of saying that the lyrics were the outpouring of a sexual passion that had not found fulfilment in her life.

Most of words used in the poem are monosyllabic and this definitely contributes to the musicality of the song. Her passion carries her along, leaving her no time for ornamentation. The intensity of the poet's passion and the urgency of her desire are suitably conveyed by the swift moving rhythm of the lines resulting in a lyric much simpler, much less ornate than the other lyrics in this sequence.

The flavour may be distinctly Tagorean as Sarojini Naidu's epigraph from Tagore suggest: "My passion all burnt as the flame of Salvation/ The flower of my love shall become the ripe-fruit of Devotion". But the lyric fails to achieve the unification of souls that Sarojini craved for. Salvation through renunciation of the world is not for Tagore, who would rather relish the world through his senses and suck its sweetness, as it were, to the last point, but without relinquishing the highest aesthetic mode. Whereas Naidu tries to form a philosophical plan- she strives to intermingle the human and the divine love of a woman offering herself in utter self-denial and do not convince the reader. Rather there is a definite tendency towards 'hedonistic self-abandon' and escape from reality. Many a critic commented that it sounds more 'rhetoric' than 'poetry'. Gokhale remarked: "It is no doubt a brave and beautiful speech" (Iyengar 219).

In fact it is almost like an invocation. A static meditation of the speaker on her desire that is not fulfilled, on the quest for the unattainable, that perpetuates in action and reinforces the cultivation of sad state of mind. The poet yearns over and over again to be one with the 'Love' but is not been able to achieve. The lyric shows that "prayer... is the proper tribute to love, that love is the partial in search of the complete ... [and] in the process there is much suffering and purgation of self through suffering" (Tilak 30). Here a Pre-Raphaelite twist can be observed.

In Pre-Raphaelite poetry the 'real' world, its events and sensations, are dwelt upon but ultimately abstracted. In reading this verse we become increasingly attentive of the mediating mind of a speaker, the poet who is not imitating the external world but distilling emotional and spiritual essences in artefact. The poem lingers in the all-consuming chambers of the mind, which, for her creator becomes a palace of art. But there is a heightening of sensuality

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On the whole, it can be said that *'If You Call Me'*, a short lyric in two stanzas of eight lines each, focuses well on the impossibility or transience of promised fulfillment in this world. The speaker's ultimate sense of inadequacy or unworthiness to achieve her desired fulfillment harmonises well with the 'irregular' rhyme scheme⁹. Again the rapidity of its rhythm balances with the desire of the beloved for swift reunion with her Love. The vicissitudes of the poet's 'pilgrimage of love' alarm us into awed attention. But the glow, the surrender, the recoil, the despair, the acceptance, with no reaction or resentment makes the poem stagnate in itself. Nevertheless the 'sustained passion' of the lyric along with its intermittent subterranean rumbling, evocation of broken images and again, the sharp rendering of naked truth bestows *'If You Call Me'* a significant place of its own. Not to speak of love is impossible, as the form and the words of the poem demonstrate, the articulated absence generates a powerful presence, reviving the cares, hopes, and fears of love's past spring. The speaker's refusal to be blank and silent rather suggests that 'Care', 'Hope', 'Fear', and 'Love' itself exist in a perpetually autumnal state of dissolution, but because 'Fear' of losing 'Love' (the inspiration for art) never ends, 'Hope' of its continuance or recovery is always present.

Readers of this poem may immediately observe the work's dominant irony that its deeply serious theme, the absence of love, seems counteracted by the lightness of its rhymes and meter. But that apparent theme is also belied by the poem's close on the accentually stressed, rhyme-words "befall" and "betide". The bottom-heaviness of the two-stanza reinforces the effect, as does the irregular metrical alteration between trochaic and iambic feet: the metrical flights of the first stanza of this poem about mortality are slowed almost to stasis by the increased line length of the second stanza. Here transience is not even artistically transformed into permanence. Rather the exotic imagery and brilliant metaphors and similes undercut the present terseness of the poem; and the simplicity and bare beauty of the poem is lost; thus making the poem stagnate in itself.

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2.10.2 Questions

1. 'Her poetry illustrates both a collusion with and resistance to the dominance of the metropolitan aesthetics'. Justify with reference from the poem '*If You Call Me*'.
2. 'If You Call Me' sound more 'rhetoric' than 'poetry'. Would you agree to the statement? Explain.
3. 'Sarojini's poetry is a rich and complex text reproducing the contradictions and debates of her age'. Analyse critically.
4. Describe the dominant irony in the poem. "*If You Call Me*".
5. What does '*Hope*' denote in this poem?

2.10.3 Notes

1. Trembling: timid and so trembling with fear. The beloved is as timid as a fear stricken forest deer. Here the urgency to meet her Love is supreme; She is so anxious that she is trembling and yet she would run more swiftly than a frightened forest deer running away from the hunter.
2. Panting: breathing hard. She would not mind 'panting' like a dove that had taken a continuous flight, and yet would seek for her Love.
3. Thrall: bondage; charm cast over it She would fly to her Love swifter than a snake at the call of its charmer.
4. What befall: whatever may happen.
5. Shod: shoes, wearing the shoes of flaming feathers or of fire she would rush across the sky, to her Love, swifter even than the lightning.
6. Dark tides: hardships and misfortunes. No matter whatever insurmountable obstacles and difficulties may beset her path she would not stop.
7. Death's deep chasms: the deep gulf caused by death may separate them but she would not stop her search.
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2.11 Caprice : An Analysis

You held a wild flower in your finger-tips,
Idly you pressed it to indifferent lips,
Idly you tore its cremson leaves apart...
Alas ! it was my heart.

You held a wine-cup in your finger-tips,
Lightly you raised it to indifferent lips,
Lightly you drank and flung away the bowl...
Alas! it was my soul.

'Caprice', a short lyric of eight lines, is undeniably one of Sarojini Naidu's striking poems. The lyric is a plea for greater sympathy and consideration in human relationship that has its significance in our social associations particularly love. Although not considered amongst the better ones, the lyric reflects our whims and our indifference, which often cause so much pain and suffering to others. It has almost the same theme of 'missing love' as in 'If You Call Me'. It is a desperate yearning to meet her 'Love' irrespective of any consequence in 'If You Call Me', while in the love-lyric 'Caprice' we are shown how maidens' hearts are broken by those unworthy of their love.

'Caprice' is included in the section *The Peacock Lute* in Sarojini Naidu's third book of poems *The Broken Wing*. We know that there was considerable criticism of her limitation as a poet when this volume was published, as there was a cataclysmic change in poetic fashion in Europe with the onset of the first wave of modernism. Yet, I feel that Naidu as a lyric poet and writer of songs is essentially an artist not to be neglected. Indeed, some of her shortest lyrics are incontrovertibly among her best. The poem 'Caprice', leaving aside its provocative theme, is a lyric-short simple and musical. It is the verse-pattern that has a distinct musical quality, the rhythm that has the cadence and liquidity of songs that are most characteristic of her and are favourites of most readers.

This liquidity is sustained in 'Caprice' by the emotional intensity and exultation, which are features of good lyrics. It is said that a 'lyric proper is the product of a swift, momentary and passionate impulse coming from

2.11 Caprice : An Analysis

You held a wild flower in your finger-tips,
Idly you pressed it to indifferent lips,
Idly you tore its crimson leaves apart...
Alas ! it was my heart.

You held a wine-cup in your finger-tips,
Lightly you raised it to indifferent lips,
Lightly you drank and flung away the bowl...
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This liquidity is sustained in 'Caprice' by the emotional intensity and exultation, which are features of good lyrics. It is said that a 'lyric proper is the product of a swift, momentary and passionate impulse coming from

without for the most part, suddenly awaking the poet into a vivid life, seizing upon him/her and setting him/her on fire'. It may be a short lived one, but the poet is possessed by the intensity. Here, Naidu's emotional fervour is at its height to express her grievance against her Love who had broken and crushed her tender heart. He has caused suffering to her merely out of his 'caprice' or lack of concern. So she is unable to hold her passion and erupts using simple imagery to come out of it in one breath:

You held a wild flower² in your fingertips,
Idly³ you pressed it to indifferent lips,
Idly you tore its crimson leaves⁴ apart...
Alas ! It was my heart.
You held a wine-cup in your fingertips,
Lightly⁵ you raised it to indifferent⁶ lips,
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The lyric shows that love for Sarojini is not so much the source and object of desire as of memory. Love as memory can be the source of bliss as well as of pain. It is this suffering that the poet communicates in 'Caprice'. Love for the poet is like a 'tyrant', for the delight it brings is evanescent but the trail of memory and yearning it leaves behind is painfully permanent. It is this agony and craving for her Love and the pain of being rejected that Naidu tries to convey in this poem through several vivid images.

The images of 'wild flower', 'crimson leaves', 'wine cup' are beautifully presented in graphic picture fusing together with visual impression. Yet in the treatment of the theme of love we find nothing but superficialities. The idealization of love that she attempts does not come out successfully. It seems to be only a sentimental release or outburst of her pain that she had carefully nurtured all along.

In the poem Naidu compares her delicate heart with the uncared—for wild flower. Just as one may indifferently kiss a flower and then break its petals and fling it away, the lover also has crushed and broken the tender heart of the poetess. Merely out of his caprice or vagary he has caused suffering to her. The visual impact is stirring but not sustained. It is not powerful enough to match the intensity of her suffering. Her unfulfilled desire is shifted

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This may apparently show Sarojini's inclination towards the Pre-Raphaelite love poetry, wherein gestures of renunciation appear to be inevitable sometimes compulsive. But the resulting melancholy and ethereal final effects that the dialectic of desire and renunciation convey in the poetry of Christina Rossetti and Swinburne is not fulfilled in here. The powerful impression of artistic goals, values and procedures found among the Pre-Raphaelite poets is not achieved. In the love poems of the Pre-Raphaelites, there is certain asceticism; passion itself speaking a chastened language—the language, generally, of sorrowful but absolute renunciation. This motive, passion remembered and repressed, condemned to eternal memory and eternal sorrow, is missing in Sarojini's poem 'Caprice'. She is too quickly back in the world and its preoccupations. It is perhaps because Sarojini imbibed her aesthetics from the 'Decadents'⁷ whose works are marked by an over-refinement of style, cultivated artificiality and abnormality of content. Putting the blame on her Love she fails to attain the exigencies of renunciation that shape the poetry of Morris, Swinburne and Rossetti.

2.11.1 Structure and Style

It is said that Sarojini never quite excelled in understanding or revealing human nature. And here it is clothed in dreamlike vagueness of flower petals and wine glasses. Nevertheless, the swift outpouring of her anguish or her grievance against her Love attune well to the simple rhyme scheme⁸ in 'Caprice'. It glosses the intensity of the poet's passion suitably conveyed by

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the swift moving rhythm of the lines; thus resulting in a lyric much simpler. Concurrently, the rare union of simplicity with sophistication of epigrammatic terseness makes the poem quite graceful; like 'Idly you tore its crimson leaves apart...' or 'Lightly you raised it to indifferent lips'. But, the diction steeped in sensuous warmth often leading to excess makes the poem quite superficial. This could be because the English romantics like Keats and Shelley and the Pre-Raphaelites⁹, like Swineburn and Rossetti had a substantial influence upon Sarojini. But she could not exercise their influence to the fullest. The poet seemed to be far too satisfied with her already tried out and over-exhausted forms of writings and where she tried her new style and technique, she did not succeed.

Naturally most of her poems in this collection have a repetitive, formulaic structure, 'Caprice' being one of them. The stanzas are almost identical in form and rhyme scheme; only the images and words change. Such a structure was found in the 'roundel', a literary form popular in the poetry of the 1890s. Its key features, including a simple rhyme scheme and refrains, are found in many of Sarojini's poetry. Similarly, one can find in her poem 'Caprice' the penchant for mood, music and dreamy ephemerality, which were common in the 1890s poets, who were reacting to the high seriousness and moral questioning of the Victorian poets.

In spite of all tapestry and decor of different genres, the resemblances and differences that outline Sarojini's poem 'Caprice' has an "individual beauty of its own". 'Caprice', with the entire abruptness has its own peculiar charm and beauty. The words are carefully chosen both with reference to their sense and sound. And this very care for the music and melody of words predisposes her to the use of sonorous words. The lyric has a bird-like singing quality and sing as if by some natural magic of its own. But the use of adjectival and symbolic excess simultaneously weakens the emotions making the poem seemingly artificial.

The limitations of her craftsmanship thus become obvious. 'Caprice' downplays the intellectual aspect of human personality. At the same time it celebrates life with all its emotions and sensuality. In doing so certain words are repeated so frequently that they tend to lose their effectiveness. Words like 'idly', 'lightly', 'alas', each are repeated twice in a poem of eight lines. This evokes a loss of meaning; a loss of intensity at first; and then even the sound value gradually loses its power of moving us. She uses couplets to

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stress on the need of love in human relationship. It displays her technical skill but the aesthetic purpose is not attained.

For Sarojini, cruelty is better than indifference and she would enjoy being a victim of his harshness. Thus we see in 'Caprice' an apparent glorification of the beloved's suffering and a preoccupation with pain and affliction. It is fully solipsistic; its speaker is distant from any possible action to resolve her impassioned mental state. Rather, her inwardness is only enhanced during the psychological events portrayed in the poem. Sarojini, at this juncture skilfully makes use of iambic couplet at the end of both the stanzas to expose the futility of endurance and focus on the impossibility of promised fulfilment in this world. It seems she is compelled to dwell on lost possibilities, on memories, on painful and poignant states of feelings. In the process the aesthetic purpose is lost and the focus is shifted. It is reinforcing unequal love and therefore continues to blame the lover for his indifference. She fails to portray the need of love in true human relationships, the intended purpose of the poem. It ends in justifying the disdain.

The rhymed last two lines, the 'split couplets', one iambic pentameter and the other iambic dimeter, at the bottom of both the stanzas undoubtedly add to the heaviness of the poem already projected. But the couplet commonly used as an emotionally intensive unit, do not add power to the whole; it is nothing more than a mere tapestry. The rumination of the speaker remains static on the quest for the unattainable; only that it reinstates her loneliness, anxiety and cultivation of her melancholic state of mind. "A human being does not stand out as a living person with his or her manifold facets of an individual ... They are effervescent fantasy clothed in flowery epithets and similes" (Sengupta 96).

However, 'Caprice' cannot be denied its individual submerged beauty. Her subdued pain caused by the rejection by her Love leaves her no time for ornamentation. This makes the lyric simple and spontaneous. In the expression of her sentiment, her wrecked heart illustrated by the broken petal of a flower or even the rejected wine glass one can observe a perfect management of rhythm and internal rhymes. It cultivates a tone of languorous melancholy, fully exploiting the elegiac potential of its materials. Overall, the mournful tone, and the mood of 'aesthetic withdrawal' give the lyric 'Caprice' a beauty of its own.

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2.11.2 Questions

1. 'Naidu compares her delicate heart with the uncared-for wild flower' Establish in what relation a wild flower is compared to the poet's heart? Critically analyse the given line with reference to the poem 'Caprice'.
2. 'It is the verse-pattern that has a distinct musical quality, the rhythm that has the cadence and liquidity of song'. Do you agree? Explain.
3. 'Her subdued pain caused by the rejection by her Love leaves her no time for ornamentation. This makes the lyric simple and spontaneous'. Analyse critically with reference to the poem 'Caprice'.
4. Discuss in short the influence of the Pre-Raphaelite on Sarojini.
5. Limitations of Sarojini are obvious—write a short critique.
6. Explain any two of images used in the poem caprice : (i) 'wild flower', (ii) 'crimson leaves', (iii) 'wine cup'

2.11.3 Notes

1. Caprice: whim. The title 'Caprice' proves fitting as the lyric goes because it sings the indifference, the lack of concern of her Love that has caused so much pain and suffering to the poet.
2. A wild flower: is always uncared for; it grows in the wilderness without any one's care and dies without any sympathy. So is the love of the poet which is neglected and abandoned by her Love. Wild flower symbolises the delicate heart of the beloved.
3. Idly: casually. Just as one may unconcernedly kiss a flower and then break its petals and fling it away, so also the lover has crushed and broken the tender heart of the poetess.
4. Crimson leaves: red or cerise coloured leaves. Here it denotes the red or pink coloured petals of the wild flower, which is her heart.
5. Lightly: without due consideration or flippantly. Just as one may carelessly pick up a wine bowl and fling it without any concern.
6. Indifferent: apathetic or unsympathetic. Here the poet feels that the lips/ kisses of her Love are as apathetic as the indifferent lips on wine glass.
7. It is difficult to work out the exact nature by which she is influenced said Paranjape

2.11.2 Questions

1. 'Naidu compares her delicate heart with the uncared-for wild flower' Establish in what relation a wild flower is compared to the poet's heart? Critically analyse the given line with reference to the poem 'Caprice'.
2. 'It is the verse-pattern that has a distinct musical quality, the rhythm that has the cadence and liquidity of song'. Do you agree? Explain.
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8. Rhyme scheme: a a, b b; a a, c c.
9. Pre-Raphaelite: Throughout the Pre-Raphaelite love poetry, a dialectic of desire and renunciation is at work thematically. Whether a depicted passion is visceral or idealized, its object and therefore any fulfilment of desire are almost always unattainable. As a result, the finest poetry of Christina and Dante Rossetti, of Morris and Swinburne, are essentially elegiac: melancholy poetry of intense unsatisfied longing, of unrealised potential and of loss. The emotional malaise characteristic of Pre-Raphaelite poetic personae prompts most of them eventually to renounce the quest for fulfilment in this world in favour of attaining it in a concretely envisioned afterlife or in some surrogate form (usually a dream) or in art itself. Thus, the Pre-Raphaelite love poem often becomes a self-conscious emblem of accomplished perfection of the ideal itself and of the sense of fulfilment that its contents may nevertheless describe as impossible to attain. Art in this way achieves transcendence “outside” the mutable world. Even in the most sensual Pre-Raphaelite poems, such as Swinburne’s *Anactoria*, where the poet Sappho speaks, the poetic enterprise assuages the longings of personae who often are themselves artists. Ironically, this school of poets whom James Buchanan labelled “fleshly” usually depicts desires and pleasures of the flesh only in order ultimately to expose their futility except as passports to a superior and transcendent ideal realm and as inspirations for art, in which the torturous ardour of human passion come most attractively to fruition. Pre-Raphaelite poetry thus often focuses on the impossibility or transience of promised fulfilment in this world, but also, as an unexpected corollary, on a speaker’s or central character’s ultimate sense of inadequacy or unworthiness to achieve a desired fulfilment.

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2.11.5 A Biographical Chronology

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- 1895 : She was sent to England, against her will. Receives a special scholarship plus a passage from the Nizam of Hyderabad.
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- 1912-1914 : Often meets Gokhale in London.
- 1914, 8 August : Meets Mahatma Gandhi.
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- 1915 February : Both Aghorenath and Gokhale die; publishes a tribute to the latter in *The Bombay Chronocle*. Virtually leaves Hyderabad, Setting herself up in Taj Mahal hotel Bombay.
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- 1923 : Sides with the "No-Changers" (Gandhian faction) in the rift in the Congress.
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- 1943-1944 : Assists in the relief efforts in Hyderabad for the victims of Bengal Famine.
- 1945 May : Randheera, her youngest son, dies.
- 1947, 23 March : Presides over the Asian Relations Conference, New Delhi, and delivers the Presidential Address.
- 15 August : India becomes free.
- July-November : Officiates as the Governor of United Provinces in place of Dr. B. C. Roy.
- November : Continues as Governor because of Roy's resigning post.
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Unit 3 Toru Dutt : Poems

Structure :

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 - 3.1.1 Notes
- 3.2 Lakshman : An Analysis
 - 3.2.1 Structure and Style :
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- 3.3 Our Casuarina Tree : An Analysis
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3.1 Introduction : Toru Dutt, a phenomenal poet of Colonial India

The earliest Indian writers in English wrote at a time when there was no such category as 'Indian Writing in English'. Toru Dutt (1856-1877) was one such prodigy. A handful of English poems testify to her position at the source of this tradition that was not yet quite a tradition. At a time when Indian writing in English was seen to be largely synonymous with fiction, and fiction with the novel, it is worth remembering this figure. She and her creative work stand at the confluence of languages and tradition. She was born in Bengal, educated in France and Cambridge, and returned to Bengal to write quite a few of her poems. In a climate in which most of Dutt's contemporaries and

predecessors were writing of historical figures and events, or turning to English literary conventions for their models, Toru Dutt took up a form, the sonnet, that came to her from the English language and opened it on to a vista such as the English language had not known before. She delved into the treasures of English and French literatures in which she was educated, and acknowledged without reserve her debt to the countries which inspired her. Simultaneously she placed her country on the international map of letters.

Toru was writing in a period of Indian History that was overshadowed by Macaulay's Minute¹ on Indian Education and Lord William Bentinck's ruling of 1835, promoting European education among the 'native' and channelling all educational funds towards the use of English education alone. The learning of English was compulsory for all educated India. This further helped to promote the 'hours of idleness' in the field of Indo-Anglian poetry. But Toru Dutt, a sensitive poet, realised that her own Indian background was precious and that she would have to commingle it with her earlier knowledge of French and English. She turned from time to time to the *Sheaf* either to revise it or to add a piece or two in anticipation of a possible second edition. And yet she was already feeling the "need for roots".

Soon, she plunged into learning Sanskrit with the help of her father on November 23, 1875 and by September 6, 1876 she wrote to Mary Martin: "I hope I shall be able to bring out another '*Sheaf* not gleaned in French but in Sanskrit fields..."² (Iyengar 59). Toru had indeed learned Sanskrit; she laved in Ramayana, Mahabharata and Sakuntala and translated a few tales from the original Sanskrit into English verse. In spite of her ill health was planning companion '*Sheaf* gleaned in Sanskrit Fields'. She was determined to probe into India's Classical Literature and in a letter to Mary³ she expressed her eagerness to read the glorious epics of Mahabharata and Ramayana in the original. She wrote: "I shall be quite a Sanskrit Pundit when I revisit old Cambridge. Ah! I so long to be there" (Sengupta Padmini 10). But this did not happen. She could not visit her old place of love. She might have had she lived longer.

Here a mention must be made that Toru often expressed her fascination, her longing for the freedom of life abroad. But she quickly reverted to her Indian environment as Sanskrit to her was as old and as grand a language as Greek, *The Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan* posthumously published

in 1878), which were rated to be 'the most mature of her writings' are on Indian themes. In this regard H. A. L. Fisher wrote:

"...this child of the green valley of the Ganges has by sheer force of native genius earned for herself the right to be enrolled in the great fellowship of English poets" (*Indian Writing in English* 73).

Yet, the celebrated Indo-Anglian poet Toru Dutt, whose work invariably found place in syllabi, was usually presented as a brilliant, protected, upper-class child poet, who died early of consumption. Rarely did students learn that, like her uncle Ramesh Chunder Dutt, she was a nationalist and a passionate republican; that she was widely read in the history and literature of the French Revolution, or that she translated speeches made in the 'French Chamber Of Deputies' around the time of the Revolution for Indian nationalist journals. Having set foot on French soil at the early age of 13 (along with her parents and sister Aru), she learnt French with remarkable ease and speed. During her brief stay at Nice, Toru absorbed and deeply appreciated the French romantic literature and became an ardent lover of France.

Before the winter of 1869, when Toru with her parents, had sailed for Europe, she was entirely in Kolkata between their two homes in Rambagan and *Bagmari*. She was especially fond of the *Bagmari* Garden House and her sonnet on it is among her best poems.

...Drunken with beauty then, or gaze and gaze
On a primeval Eden, in amaze".

However, Toru's idyllic childhood in the land of her birth was to mature abroad. Govin Chunder was determined to give his children the advantages of foreign travel and education, and Toru and her sister Aru were the first Bengali girls to cross the 'Black Waters'. They adored France, and next to their love for India, mostly France inspired them. The French also claimed Toru later as a French woman; she too acclaimed herself in her diary that she was an 'indomitable and steadfast French woman'.

Toru, besides being a poet, was a translator of poetry. Her intimacy with the French language and the French symbolist poetry palpably informs her poems, and the French poets she translated into English with her sister Aru are to be found in the book, *A Sheaf Glean'd in French Fields*. Translation and creative practice and the connection between these two are found in her

sonnet *Baugmaree*. It is said to be the first artistically satisfying sonnet in Indian writing in English that occupied the space between translation and transformation. Dutt took this form, 'sonnet', from the English language. But the sort of similes she used in her poems, in which a colour is compared to sound, was unusual in English poetry of her time. It showed Dutt's readings in the poetry of the French symbolists. She poised between English and French in her vision of a Bengal landscape — to resolve the awful contradiction between the world which she wanted to write about, the world of the 'quiet pools' over which the 'seemul leans' and the (English Language she had to write in. The need therefore, is to examine the West's reception of Toru Dutt as a nineteenth-century Indian woman poet writing in English in the colonial period.

The dominant critical tendency, Alpana Sharma Knippling argued, was to categorise Toru Dutt either as a "true daughter of India" or as "imitative of western poetic trends", and this was a flawed position as it was not possible to locate her either as "colonial" or "anti-colonial" (Knippling 216). Knippling went further for a more nuanced perspective where Dutt was regarded as inhabiting an in-between space, resisting both patriarchy and colonial oppression. The kind of poetry she was writing, the different realities she used in her poems to teach her own voice did not exist in English; it was only to be found in French. The odd similies composed of unlikes, 'red' and startling like a 'trumpet's sound', reminds us of the simultaneous coming together and breaking apart of languages that made that incursion possible.

It became possible, for her mind was unclouded by narrow national or linguistic inhibitions or mental barriers. She delved into the treasures of English and French literatures, and acknowledged the wealth of both. This exposure, however, did not lead her to bring that wealth to the service and development of Bengali poetry, as it had in the case of her elder contemporary, Michael Madhusudan Dutt (1824-1873). The failure to follow in the footsteps of this major poet and write in Bengali should not, however, be regarded as a flaw in Toru's patriotism. In fact Toru Dutt pioneered the Indian Women's English literary tradition in the mid-nineteenth century, and was the harbinger of a new era in Indo-Anglian literature or Indian writings in English.

The prose and poetry of this early genius developed a dynamic postcolonial view of the author and her writing. Struggling to emerge within and from the medium of her writing, autobiographical in content or

confessional in narrative technique, was a young woman's voice tussling to negotiate the cross-cultural complexities resulting from the Indian-European encounter. The extraordinary space that Toru Dutt occupied between translation and creative practice illuminates the emergence in her writing of the colonial modernity.

And how far does this formative colonial literary identity prefigure the present Dutt points towards an influential poet of a later generation, A. K. Ramanujan, Ramanujan, a master of the line and the image' in his English poetry, was also a translator of Kannada and ancient Tamil verse. Kaiser Fluq, while probing the *Dutt Family Album*, remarked : "They are generally disparaged as imitative writers, merely of historical interest. But the youngest writer produced by the family, Toru Dutt is a talent of a different order — the appellation "genius" in its fullest sense may not inappropriate for her. She deserves an essay all to herself.

A glance at Toru Dutt's use of language is enough to show the difference between her style and that of her predecessors. The poems her father and her uncles wrote all belonged to a recognisable school of nineteenth-century poetry. Toru Dutt's poetry transcended that school, evolving a separate identity. Her ballads on legendary or historical themes proved her 'a good craftsman in verse'. Her feeling was impeccable, and her eyes and ears were alike trained for poetic description or dialogue. In the placid Sanskrit narrative, the appearance of a god or goddess was a normal thing. In an English poem however, the words need wings of a sort to impose that willing suspension of disbelief or even induce that momentary surge of belief without which the poem would fail in its prime purpose. It was here that Toru outshone her predecessors with the possible exception of Henry Derizio.

In her poem Savitri, when Satyavan is dead and Savitri is holding anxious vigil by his side, Yama appears before her. Yama is the God of Death, but he is also the Lord of Dharma. He is the great upholder of Law and not only the Lord of the Kingdom of Shadows as in Romesh Chunder Dutt's poems. A quick look at both the brief extracts from the original poems would show the difference.

Toru's description of Yama's approach
She saw a stranger slowly glide
Beneath the boughs that shrunk aghast.
Upon his head he wore a crown

That shimmered in the doubtful light;
His vestment scarlet reached low down,
His waist, a golden girdle dight.
His skin was dark as bronze; his face
Irradiate, and yet severe;
His eyes had much of love and grace,
But glowed so bright, they filled with fear.

Romesh Chunder Dutt's description of Yama's approach :

In the bosom of the shadows rose a Vision dark and dead,
Shape of gloom in inky garment and a crown was on his head,
Gleaming Form of stable splendour, blood-red was his sparkling eye,
And a fatal noose he carried, grim and godlike, dark and high!

It becomes clear that Toru's Yama is both 'Death' and 'Dharma', whereas Romesh Chunder's Yama is only the 'Dark God'. Here his careful art failed. The difference was in the manner in which her language addressed her experience and in her vision that radiated beyond the boundaries within which most of the nineteenth-century poetry in English was confined. Her awareness of her own 'Indianness' was not restricted to Indian historical themes and the reworking of Indian legends. The mythological content of her poems did not exist extrinsically, but was integrated with her consciousness, her memory. In her poetry observed Chaudhuri, We confront for the first time a language that is crafted out of the vicissitudes of an individual life and a sensibility that belongs to modern India" (*The Dutt Family Album and Toru Dutt* 69).

In *The Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan*, the alchemy of change becomes obvious. When Indo-Anglian writing was more imitative than necessary, the poems took a great stride from a barren imitation to authentic and inspiring writing. She was no longer attempting vainly to compete with European Literature on her own ground, rather she turned to the legends of her own race and country for inspiration. Thus, "Genuine lyric poetry and lyrical narrative poetry, both of the Romantic and Victorian type, came fully into their own...with the generation of Toru Dutt" (Gokak xx). From French and English interests she became more and more engrossed in Indian themes. She was an Indian at heart, in her imagery, in her thinking and in her

personality. Nevertheless, she was an ardent lover of France and England⁴ and a connoisseur of the languages of both these countries. She therefore fitted into an international world happily and welded the Christian religion into her Hindu background; here perhaps she laid her richest claim with her serene faith in Christ. At the same time she turned to Hindu mythology avidly because she felt a deep respect for Hindu Gods, heroes and heroines, as she so frequently reiterated. This perhaps made Gosse remark in his introductory memoir : "Toru's *Ballads* breathe a Vedic simplicity of temper and are singularly devoid of littleness and frivolity" (*Toru Dutt* 11).

The poet in her mythological verses, like *Savitri*, *Lakshman*, *Prahlad*, seemed to chant to herself those songs of her mother's race to which she turned with great pleasure.

Her Christian faith did not conflict with her attraction or addiction to the "deep magic" of the Hindu epics, any more than a modern Greek poet's Christianity conflicts with his fascination for the Homeric myths. She was now an Indian poet writing in English; she was "autochthonous". She was one with India's woman singers, no room now for artificiality or stimulated hothouse efflorescence. Toru by now had rooted herself in her own land, and she pleasingly responded to the heartbeats of the antique racial tradition. As children, she and her brother and sister had heard the stories of the Hindu epics and Puranas, stories of mystery, miracle and local tradition from the lips of their own mother. Later exploration in the original Sanskrit had given Toru a keener poetic edge to the stories and legends. They seemed to answer to a profound inner need for links with the living past of India, and she cared little if Christian or sceptic cavilled at her. This perhaps made Sengupta remark: "No modern Oriental has given us so strange an insight into the conscience of the Asiatic as is presented in the stories of *Prahlad and of Savitri*, or so quaint a piece of religious fancy as the ballad of *Jogadhya Uma*" (Sengupta 10).

Overtly it can be said, Toru's precocious craftsmanship was amazing; she interplayed the culture of her land with that of England and France. And at the age of eighteen she made India acquainted with the poets of France in the rhyme of England and blended in her three souls and three traditions. No more she competed with her European contemporary and conscientiously turned to the legends of her own race and own country for inspiration. Toru, an English woman by education, a French woman at heart, a poet in English

and a prose writer in French was now a true Hindu by race and tradition.

The Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan proved Toru as a landmark in the history of the progress of culture in the mid-nineteenth century. For the first time it revealed to the West the soul of India through the medium of English poetry. In fact, scholars are profuse in their praise of this work for its finely knit verses full of vigour and variety. “Toru was one of those leaders of literature who at a time when Bengal was held in low esteem in Europe, raised it high among the nations of the West. In days when Bengali’s were losing heart and despairing of themselves and their country, she turned deliberately from the paths of foreign song to write of the stories of her own motherland” (Das 21). But she died an untimely death, merely at the age of twenty-one, in the full bloom of her genius⁵.

3.1.1 Notes

1. Thomas Macaulay, the British statesman and historian, was the principal architect of English education in India and the important spokesman for literary studies in Britain. A reader might enjoy the following extract from a toast proposed in 1846 in Edinburgh by Macaulay: “To the literature of Britain, to that literature, the brightest, the purest, the most durable of all the glories of our country... to that literature which has exercised an influence wider than that of our commerce and mightier than that of our arms; to that literature which has taught France the principles of liberty and has furnished Germany with models of art... to that literature before the light of which impious and cruel superstitions are fast taking flight on the banks of the Ganges... To the literature of Britain, men! And wherever the literature of Britain spreads may it be attended by British virtue and British Freedom!” (Viswanathan Gauri Oxford Literary Review 9 1987, pp2-26 from Thomas Macaulay, Miscellaneous writings Vol.3 pp398-399).
2. The letter was written in 6 September 1876.
3. Mary Martin, was Toru’s lifelong friend and the recipient of most of her letters. They met at Cambridge.
4. In France and England, Toru and her elder sister Aru, under the fostering care of their parents were able to live an isolated and free life. Toru loved France second to India, and England she wished to settle in because

she felt women were allowed more freedom there than in India. Most of the women in Bengal in the middle of the nineteenth century were very much in purdah and Toru often felt the restrictions hampered the freedom she so appreciated when abroad. 'The free air of Europe and the free life there, are things not to be had here'. Toru wrote in a letter recalling her days in England". " we cannot stir out from our garden without being stared at or having a sun-stroke". In England the nameless pressure of the ancestral place was withdrawn, and both the sisters matured in that atmosphere.

5. **The Century Magazine for January 1884 states:** Toru was born in 1856 and died in 1877, only 21 years of age. Yet in her short life she accomplished one of the greatest literary feats of modern times. She spoke the native language of Calcutta, but before she was 18... she acquired a perfect mastery of French, English, German and Sanskrit. In 1876 she published a book entitled *A Sheaf Gleaned In French Fields*. The book contained one hundred and sixty six poems, being original compositions in English, or almost literal translations from the foremost of French poets, Victor Hugo, Alfred Musset and others... This remarkable person was no doubt a genius, but her life was passed in the most exhausting labour and the esteem and variety of her studies; each being pursued with the utmost diligence and thoroughness, at last undermined her health and destroyed her life... George Eliot, George Sand and Madame de Staël did not exhibit such a remarkable energy of genius at the age when this Indian girl closed her life. This was perhaps the most remarkable piece of work that was accomplished in so short a time. She reproduced these French poems with absolute fidelity to the original, and at the same time expressed herself in English as well as though it had been her vernacular life. This was perhaps the most remarkable piece of work that was accomplished in so short a time. She reproduced these French poems with absolute fidelity to the original, and at the same time expressed herself in English as well as though it had been her vernacular.

3.2 Lakshman : An Analysis

'Hark! Lakshman! Hark, again that cry!
It is,—it is my husband's voice!
Oh haste!n, to his succour fly,
No more hast thou, dear friend, a choice.
He calls on thee, perhaps his foes
Environ him on all sides round,
That wail,"— it means death's final throes!
Why standest thou, as magic-bound?

Is this a time for thought,—oh gird
Thy bright sword on, and take thy bow!
He heeds not, hears not any word,
Evil hangs over us, I know!
Swift in decision, prompt in deed,
Brave unto rashness, can this be,
The man to whom all looked at need?
Is it my brother, that I see!

Ah no, and I must run alone,
For further here I cannot stay;
Art thou transformed to blind dumb stone!
Wherefore this impious, strange delay!
That cry,—that cry,—it seems to ring
Still in my ears,—I cannot bear
Suspense; if help we fail to bring
His death at least we both can share.'

'Oh calm thyself, Videhan Queen,
No cause is there for any fear,
Hast thou his prowess never seen?
Wipe off for shame that dastard tear!
What being of demonian birth
Could ever brave his mighty arm ?

Is there a creature on the earth
That dares to work our hero harm ?

The lion and the grisly bear
Cower when they see his royal look,
Sun-staring eagles of the air
His glance of anger cannot brook,
Pythons and cobras at his tread
To their most secret coverts glide,
Bowed to the dust each serpent head
Erect before in hooded pride.

* * *

He call for help! Canst thou believe
He like a child would shriek for aid
Or pray for respite or reprieve —
Not of such metal is he made!
Delusive was that piercing cry,—
Some trick of magic by the foe;
He has a work,—he cannot die,
Beseech me not from hence to go.

For here beside thee, as a guard
'Twas he commanded me to stay,
And dangers with my life to ward
If they should come across thy way.
Send me not hence, for in this wood
Bands scattered of the giants lurk,
Who on their wrongs and vengeance brood,
And wait the hour their will to work.'

'Oh shame! And canst thou make my weal
A plea for lingering! Now I know
What thou art Lakshman! And I feel
Far better were an open foe.
Art thou a coward ? I have seen
Thy bearing in the battle-fray

Where flew the death-fraught arrows keen,
Else had I judged thee so today.

But then thy leader stood beside!
Dazzles the cloud when shines the sun,
Reft of his radiance, see it glide
A shapeless mass of vapours dun;
So of thy courage,—or if not,
The matter is far darker dyed,
What makes thee loth to leave this spot?
Is there a motive thou wouldst hide?

He perishes—well, let him die!
His wife henceforth shall be mine own!
Can that thought deep imbedded lie
Within thy heart's most secret zone!
Search well and see! One brother takes
His kingdom,—one would take his wife!
A fair partition!—But it makes
Me shudder, and abhor my life

Remain here, with a vain pretence
Of shielding me from wrong and shame,
Or go and die in his defence
And leave behind a noble name.
Choose what thou wilt,—I urge no more,
My pathway lies before me clear,
I did not know thy mind before,
I know thee now,—and have no fear.'

She said and proudly from him turned,—
Was this the gentle Sita? No.
Flames from her eyes shot forth and burned,
The tears therein had ceased to flow.
'Hear me, O Queen, ere I depart,
No longer can I bear thy words,

They lacerate my inmost heart?
And torture me, like poisoned swords.

Have I deserved this at thine hand?
Of lifelong loyalty and truth
Is this the meed? I understand
Thy feelings, Sita, and in sooth
I blame thee not,—but thou mightst be
Less rash in judgement. Look! I go,
Little I care what comes to me
Wert thou but safe,—God keep thee so!

In going hence I disregard
The plainest orders of my chief,
A deed for me,—a soldier,—hard
And deeply painful, but thy grief
And language, wild and wrong, allow
No other course. Mine be the crime,
And mine alone,—but oh, do thou
Think better of me from this time.

Here with an arrow, lo, I trace
A magic circle ere I leave,
No evil thing within this space
May come to harm thee or to grieve.
Step not, for aught, across the line,
Whatever thou mayst see or hear,
So shalt thou balk the bad design
Of every enemy I fear.

And now farewell ! what thou hast said,
Though it has broken quite my heart,
So that I wish that I were dead—
I would before, O Queen, we part
Freely forgive, for well I know
That grief and fear have made thee wild,

We part as friends,—is it not so?
And speaking thus,—he sadly smiled.

‘And oh ye sylvan gods that dwell
Among these dim and sombre shades,
Whose voices in the breezes swell
And blend with noises of cascades,
Watch over Sita, whom alone
I leave, and keep her safe from harm,
Till we return unto our own,
I and my brother, arm in arm.

For though ill omens round us rise
And frighten her dear heart, I feel
That he is safe. Beneath the skies
His equal is not,—and his heel
Shall tread all adversaries down,
Whoever they may chance to be.—
Farewell, O Sita! Blessings crown
And peace for ever rest with thee!’

He said, and straight his weapons took
His bow and arrows pointed keen,
Kind,—nay, indulgent,—was his look,
No trace of anger there was seen,
Only a sorrow dark, that seemed
To deepen his resolve to dare
All dangers. Hoarse the vulture screamed,
As out he strode with dauntless air.

The handling of Indian myth in Indo-Anglian poetry may be judged by perusing Toru Dutt’s ballad on ‘Lakshman’ that capture some of the beauty, mystery and simplicity of ancient legend. Albeit the recent movement towards a compact style shorn of superfluous ornaments had an impact on Toru, in this stately poem of *The Ancient Ballads and the Legends of Hindustan* she displays with an epic grandeur a sublime narrative style that is both simple and

transparent. It has on the whole been healthy. It has elicited a more exacting loyalty of words to idea, image and impulse.

In 'Lakshman', as in her other mythological poems, Toru is mainly interested in the telling of the ancient tale. It is not a mere tale or fertile imagination of the poet; but a part of the consciousness of her childhood, when she had heard the stories of the Hindu epics from the 'lips of her own mother'. It is thus with a very sure instinct, Toru in these immortal stories uses the right material for the expression of her own maturing poetic powers. Her woman's imagination weave myriad coloured picture and she embarks upon her work.

It is a difficult situation to give the colloquy of Sita and Lakshman a mystic action and a local habitation. But with the childhood faith of the 'pure eternal feminine', Toru has almost accomplished it. Toru scores through the simple sufficiency of her clear understanding of the tragedy. The Ballad breathes a Vedic simplicity of temper and is especially devoid of modesty. Here sophistication certainly would have failed, but her radiant simplicity has succeeded. In the poem, Sita is portrayed as obstinate, foolish and cruel whereas Lakshman is wise, gentle and understanding. Against his wishes he leaves her alone in the forest:

"Farewell, O Sita! Blessings crown
And peace for ever rest with thee"

He said, and straight his weapons took,
His bow and arrows pointed keen,
Kind,— nay, indulgent, — was his look,
No trace of anger there was seen,
Only sorrow dark, that seemed
To deepen his resolve to dare
All dangers. Hoarse the vulture screamed,
As out he strode with dauntless air.

(lines 167-176)

Lakshman, most loyal of the four brothers¹, leaving Sita alone against his better judgement because she would not see any reason, and so leaving her a prey to Ravana, is almost like 'a perfect Greek tragedy', observe many critics. Toru achieves this certainly because of her excellent craftsmanship.

Her sensation for words is unimpeachable and her observation and eye are alike trained for poetic description or dialogue. She has developed this masterly skill from her childhood and imbibed so deep a love for the ancient ballads of India, is perhaps due to her mothers' gentle influence in home, her songs and gift of story-telling. Once Toru wrote to Mile Clarisse Bader, her French friend:

“When I hear my mother sing, in the evenings, the old songs of the country, I weep almost always” (Sengupta 19).²

An examination of the poem ‘Lakshman’ will reveal Toru’s genuine urge and her profound inner need for links with the ‘living past of India’. The poem is a simple conversation between Sita and her brother-in-law, where Sita takes rather an unfair advantage of her staunch guardian’s noble nature. She even goes to the extent of insulting Lakshman:

“Oh shame! and canst thou make my weal
A plea for lingering! Now I know
What thou art, Lakshman! And I feel
Far better were an open foe.
Art thou a coward? I have seen
Thy bearing in the battle-fray
Where flew the death-fraught arrows keen,
Else had I judged thee so today. (65-72)

What makes thee loth to leave this spot?
Is there a motive thou wouldst hide? (79-80)

He perishes — well, let him die!
His wife henceforth shall be mine own!
Can that thought deep imbedded lie
Within thy heart’s most secret zone!
Search well and see! One brother takes
His kingdom,— one would take his wife!
A fair partition!— But it makes
Me shudder, and abhor my life” (81-88).

The theme is derived from the Ramayana. Sita, deeply moved by the beauty of a golden deer roaming about the hermitage, pleads with her husband

(Rama) to get it for her. Rama goes in pursuit of the deer in spite of the forebodings expressed by Lakshman who guesses that the golden deer is Maricha in disguise sent by Ravana⁴. After a long pursuit Rama sends an arrow, which fells Maricha. While dying he cries out in Rama's voice for help. Hearing the agonised cry, Sita mistakes it for Rama's voice. She could not hold herself and insist on Lakshman to rush to help Rama. Toru Dutt's poem, 'Lakshman', begins at this point :

"Hark ! Lakshman! Hark, again that cry!
It is, — my husband's voice!
Oh hasten, to his succour fly,
No more hast thou, dear friend, a choice.
He calls on thee, perhaps his foes
Environ him on all sides round,
That wail, — it means death's final throes!
Why standest thou, as magic-bound? (1-8)

However, Lakshman remains unmoved, as he has been instructed by Rama not to leave the hermitage and to give protection to Sita. Moreover, Lakshman knows that Rama is fortified against death and is invincible; he tries to calm Sita and make her understand that no creature on earth would dare to "work our hero harm". Even the 'lion', the 'pythons' and 'cobras' glide to their most 'secret converts' at his tread—.

"The lion and the grisly bear
Cower when they see his royal look,
Sun-staring eagles of the air
His glance of anger cannot brook,
Pythons and cobras at his tread
To their most secret coverts glide,
Bowed to the dust each serpent head
Erect before in hooded pride.

Rakshasas⁵, Danavs⁶, demons, ghosts,
Acknowledge in their hearts his might,
And slink to their remotest coasts,
In terror at his very sight

Evil to him! Oh fear it not,
Whatever foes against him rise!

Banish for aye the foolish thought,
And be thyself, — bold, great, and wise” (33-48).

Yet, Sita would not move an inch from her decision; she clings to her fixed thought and charges Lakshman with being a ‘coward’.

3.2.1 Structure and Style :

The conversation is so normal and to the point that it immediately attracts the reader's attention. Toru's sympathy with the humble becomes obvious right away. The urgency of Sita's desire to bring back her husband Ram is suitably conveyed by the swift moving rhythm of the lines resulting in a lyric simple and less ornate than the original verses in Sanskrit. This has indeed brought forth a more demanding loyalty of words to idea, image and impulse; this the poet achieves perfectly in this poem. The long poem 'Lakshman', with hundred and seventy-six lines does not seem to be monotonous at all. Rather one line of the conversation leads to another in a lyrical rhyme⁷ that leads to the epic grandeur of the poem. A rugged grace of diction and spirited rhythm are uniformly observed in the poem. But, the flowery phraseology of the Sanskrit poets, their magnificence in the descriptions of the grandeur of Gods and kings are lacking in 'Lakshman'.

It is not that Toru was not able to produce the profusion and splendour in her descriptions, but she intentionally declines from such usage of magnificent diction for she has shortened and modernised her poems to suit a foreign reader. Nevertheless some critics feel that Toru was not able to produce the rich Sanskrit language in English. "The old Ballads and Legends have lost all their plaintive cadence, all the natural charm they bore when wrapped with the full-sounding music of the Sanskrit... The imagery, the scenery has even lost its own colour and profusion and ornamentation. The warmth of expression and sentiment has of necessity been toned down by the very use of Language, which even had it been in the plastic hands of Toru Dutt, could never have afforded her the delicate touch and colour which she found in the French". (Sengupta 84) At the same time, as we analyse her

poems today, more interesting formations emerge and proves the young poetess' prowess to synthesise Indian lore and different formations of English poetry. I would like to quote a few stanzas from her long poem 'Lakshman':

“And now farewell! What thou hast said,
Though it has broken quite my heart,
So that I wish I were dead —
I would before, O Queen, we part,
Freely forgive, for well I know
That grief and fear have made thee wild,
We part as friends,— is it not so?”
And speaking thus he sadly smiled.

“And oh ye sylvan gods⁸ that dwell
Among these dim and sombre shades,
Whose voices in the breezes swell
And blend with noises of cascades,
Watch over Sita, whom alone
I leave, and keep her safe from harm,
Till we return unto our own,
I and my brother, arm in arm.

For though ill omens round us rise
And frighten her dear heart, I feel
That he is safe. Beneath the skies
His equal is not,— and his heel.
Shall tread all adversaries down,
Whoever they may chance to be.
Farewell, O Sita! Blessings crown
And peace for ever rest with thee!” (145-168)

We have here part of the narrative poems that reads as well as any nineteenth century British lyric; its metric competence almost impeccable, its narration, dialogue all so immaculately clear. Besides, her management of the versification, the eight-line octosyllabic quartets, is adroit enough. In her description of the difficult situation Toru rises to the occasion and with the

gift of radiant simplicity succeeds in managing occasional unpleasantness with great dexterity.

Given the colonial context and British criticism of the position of women in our society, one need hardly point out that Sita's virtue closely matches the strangely convoluted Victorian myth of sexual purity in women. The Victorians laid great stress on sexual restraint and moral uprightness in women. The familiar logic of the myth runs somewhat like this proposition: 'a pure woman excites no sexual response' is evident in lines: We part as friends, — is it not so? That grief and fear have made thee wild, (149-150) / And oh ye sylvan gods... Watch over Sita, whom alone / I leave, and keep her safe from harm, (153-158) / And peace forever rest with thee! (168). There is another aspect to the construction. For the Victorians, women, like the Indians, were really children. Only, white women were not "half-devil, half-child" like the Orientals were, but "half-angel, half-child". Sita the real, uncorrupted Indian woman is like her white counterpart, child-like and angelic. Her purity is "God's purity". Her genuine love and devotion for Ram depicted impeccably gives a serene picture of her flawless relation with Lakshman and her devout faith in her husband Ram⁹.

Here Toru is claiming for her Sita the very sexual refinement, the purity, held as always, in the virtue of women, that the British insisted Hindu society lacked. The effort obviously is to rebut the negative image the British projected, and redeem if not the present, at least the past. The poet's main anxiety to project Sita as a 'pure woman', and Lakshman as a devout brother and a humble brother-in-law has been achieved and efficiently controlled in forms; which otherwise would have lost its sharpness in the use of ornate phraseology. In fact what has been so efficiently controlled is the poet's imagination, her longings. Sita's straining for freedom and power to rescue her husband Ram, despite her confinement within a "magic circle" is the limit the poet sees as habitable space.

No doubt Toru Dutt stands out in the assessment of contemporary critics as the major talent of Indo-Anglian literature. 'Lakshman' is definitely a befitting poem with sensitive descriptions, lyricism and vigour that compels attention. "It is unquestionably and movingly articulate, and disgrace neither the original nor the language in which they are now rendered" (Iyengar 70). One is overwhelmed by the rugged beauty that graces the poem even when Sita charges Lakshman with being a 'coward'.

3.2.2 Questions :

1. Examine Toru Dutt as the 'major talent of Indo-Anglian literature' from the poem 'Lakshman'.
2. Do you think Sita took advantage of Lakshman's humble nature? Analyse with reference to the poem 'Lakshman'.
3. Do you agree that 'Lakshman' loses its grandeur due to lack of flowery phraseology of the Sanskrit poets? Analyse the poem critically.
4. Toru Dutt's gift of 'radiant simplicity succeeds in managing occasional unpleasantness with great dexterity'. Justify with reference to the poem 'Lakshman'.

3.2.3 Notes

1. Four brothers: Ram, Lakshman, Bharat and Satrugnah.
2. The quotation is different to some extent in other texts, albeit the meaning remains the same.
3. Maricha: One of the Rakshasas in the epic Ramayana.
4. Ravana: King of the Rakshasas of Lanka. Sita was abducted by him.
5. Rakshasas: Black ape-like creatures of Lanka in the Ramayana.
6. Danavs: giants.
7. Rhyme: ababcdcd.
8. Sylvan gods: Gods of woods and forest.
9. Here the impact of Victorian poetry is being felt on the Indo-Anglian scene.

3.3 Our Casuarina Tree : An Analysis

Like a huge Python, winding round and round
The rugged trunk, indented deep with scars
Up to its very summit near the stars,
A Creeper climbs, in whose embraces bound
No other tree could live. But gallantly
The giant wears the scarf, and flowers are hung
In crimson clusters all the boughs among,
Whereon all day are gathered bird and bee;
And oft at nights the garden overflows
With one sweet song that seems to have no close,
Sung darkling from our tree, while men repose.
When first my casement is wide open thrown
At dawn, my eyes delighted on it rest;
Sometimes, and most in winter,—on its crest
A gray baboon sits statue-like alone
Watching the sunrise; while on lower boughs
His Puny offspring leap about and play;
And far and near kokilas hail the day;
And to their pastures wend our sleepy cows;
And in the shadow, on the broad tank cast
By that hoar tree, so beautiful and vast,
The water-lilies spring, like snow enmassed.

But not because of its magnificance
Dear is the Casuarina to my soul:
Beneath it we have played; though years may roll,
O sweet companions, loved with love intense,
For your sakes shall the tree be ever dear!
Blent with your images, it shall arise
In memory, till the hot tears blind mine eyes!
What is that dirge-like murmur that I hear
Like the sea breaking on a shingle-beach?
It is the tree's lament, an eerie speech,
That haply to the unknown land may reach.

Unknown, yet well-known to the eye of faith!
 Ah, I have heard that wail far, far away
 In distant lands, by many a sheltered bay,
 When slumbered in his cave the water-wraith
 And the waves gently kissed the classic shore
 Of France or Italy, beneath the moon
 When earth lay tranced in a dreamless swoon:
 And every time the music rose,—before
 Mine inner vision rose a form sublime,
 Thy form, O Tree, as in my happy prime
 I saw thee, in my own loved native clime.

Therefore I fain would consecrate a lay
 Unto thy honour, Tree, beloved of those
 Who now in blessed sleep for aye repose,
 Dearer than life to me, alas! were they!
 Mayst thou be numbered when my days are done
 With deathless trees—like those in Borrowdale,
 Under whose awful branches lingered pale,
 ‘Fear, trembling Hope, and Death, the skeleton,
 And Time the shadow’ and though weak the verse
 That would thy beauty fain, oh fain rehearse,
 May Love defend thee from Oblivion’s curse.

‘Our Casuarina Tree’, a well-known poem of Toru Dutt is a consummate self-revelation of her almost mystic affinity with trees. In the poem Toru traces the already captured moment of her childhood ‘beneath the tree’ and unburden her most intimate joy and sorrow that she associates with the tree she humanises. The poem gives a sketch of her days spent in Kolkata between her two homes in Rambagan and Baumaree.

Toru, a lover of nature, especially loved the garden house in Baumaree, and the tree in this garden house she contemplates is the Casuarina Tree that she immortalises. The tree gave them her affectionate shelter in those days of her childhood when she with her brother and sister played joyfully beneath it. But now her brother is dead and her sister no more, Toru fears that when

her 'days will be done' the Tree will be all alone like them in their grave[s]. So she desires to 'consecrate a lay unto thy honour' and hopes 'May'st thou be numbered when my [her] days are done'.

Thus she fondly describes the majestic beauty of the tree and sings the burden it bore in the poem, 'Our Casuarina Tree'.

Like a huge python, winding round and round
The rugged Trunk, indented deep with scars
Upto its very summit near the stars,
A creeper climbs, in whose embraces bound
No other trees could live. But gallantly
The giant wears the scarf, and flowers are hung
In crimson clusters all the boughs among,
Whereon all day are gathered bird and bee;
And oft at nights the garden overflows
With one sweet song that seems to have no close,
Sung darkling from our tree, while men repose. (1-11)

It is only someone who has closely observed these beautiful trees as 'gorgeous beings' and treasured them could have noted with such accurate detail the exotic appeal, the fragrance and the song that will never die. It is not only the 'magnificence' of the tree, along with it the poet's association is more impressive that makes the poem truly memorable. The poet's pining for the scenes of her native land and reliving the memories of her childhood finds its fullest expression here. 'Our Casuarina Tree' reminiscences her happy childhood and her connection with the tree under which she played gleefully 'with love intense'. At the same time she could hear 'the trees lament' from an 'unknown land' and a 'dirge-like murmur' blend with her joyful memory and 'hot tears blind [her] eyes'. Perhaps Toru's sad memory of the early death of her brother and sister, who are left alone in the grave, remind her of the loneliness of the tree in an 'unknown land'.

But not because of its magnificence
Dear is the Casuarina to my soul:
Beneath it we have played; though years may roll,
O sweet companions, loved with love intense,

For your sakes, shall the tree be ever dear!
Blent with your images, it shall arise
In memory, till the hot tears blind mine eyes!
What is that dirge-like murmur that I hear
Like the sea breaking on a shingle-beach?
It is the tree's lament, an eerie speech,
That haply to the unknown land may reach. (23-33)

These are the core lines of the poem that recapture the past and immortalises the moments of time so recaptured. It is more than a poetic evocation of the tree. The lines become more significant and revealing as they evoke the poet's inner vision of the sublime beauty along with her nostalgia for the past.

Beauty and tragedy and fatality had criss-crossed in the life of the young poet. It is said the suffering and the dark image of incomprehensible fatalities¹ that were her shadow companion, make her poems appreciable. Many critics even think that Toru's poetry is appreciated because it is closely associated with her sad life. Could be this is why Toru is so often called the Keats of Indo-English literature for more than one reason — her meteoric rise, the sensuous quality of her poetry and her premature disappearance from the literary firmament. Toru died, like John Keats, of consumption and the end came slow and sad.

One wonders if her poetry was in piety of her life. But Toru's sustained faith in 'love [that] never dies, and there is no parting known'² helped her to live with many a sorrow; and yet she hopes "May Love defend thee from Oblivion's curse" for 'dear' was 'the Casuarina to [her] soul', whom 'she loved with love intense'. 'Our Casuarina Tree' has proved this in its last line that hope of an eternal and ever happy life prevails beyond the weary days on earth. So we can say that the Casuarina tree is "both tree and symbol, and in it are implicated both time and eternity" (Iyengar 72). It makes one think whether Keats's theory of "Negative Capability"³ had an influence on her. Uncertainties had almost ruled Tom's life but she calmly lived with them, without fancying for facts or reasons. Rather she lived a life of exhausting labour, pursuing her studies with utmost 'diligence' and 'thoroughness'. By then she had already overcome, the dark waves of life and the poems she had written at this stage are undoubtedly the most matured ones. She no more gave way to fine and discordant echo of music that welled in her mind

that were often spoiled by ‘hypercritical ear’ and ‘queer mark of expression’. And “Our Casuarina Tree’ included in her *Miscellaneous Poems*, “needs no apology for its rich and mellifluous numbers. It is difficult to exaggerate when we try to estimate what we have lost in the premature death of Toru Dutt” (Arnold 432).

Needless to mention, Toru, the young genius, a noble admirer of France and England was a faithful Indian at heart. Although she has given an imported name ‘Casuarina’⁴ to her tree, in her use of imagery and in her thinking she returned to her ‘idyllic childhood’ in the land of her birth. Even ‘in distant lands’ she could hear the ‘wail’ of the tree of her land ‘far, far away’.

When slumbered in his cave the water-wraith⁵
 And the waves gently kissed the classic shore
 Of France or Italy, beneath the moon,
 When earth lay tranced in a dreamless swoon
 And every time the music rose — before
 Mine inner vision rose a form sublime,
 Thy form, O Tree, as in my happy prime
 I saw thee, in my own loved native clime. (37-44)

The poem is one of the earliest instances of the effective use of memory in Indian poetry in English. In the description of the Casuarina tree like ‘a huge Python, winding round and round...’ and in the description of the virgin beauty of the Bengal landscape, she proves her craving, her love for her land, which is India—

... far and near *kokilas*⁶ hail the day;
 And to their pasture wend our sleepy cows;
 And in the shadow, on the broad tank⁷ cast
 By that hoar tree, so beautiful and vast,
 The water-lilies spring, like snow enmassed (18-22).

Along with this description of the serene beauty of Bengal and the nostalgic celebration of the Tree in her garden house Toru reminds us of the *Yew-trees*⁸ of the Barrowdale valley. In fact the ‘Fraternal Four’ of the Barrowdale valley, of which Wordsworth writes in his *Yew-trees*, is the imagery

that suggested this theme to Toru. The poet even goes to the extent of quoting from “*Yew-trees*”: “Fear, trembling Hope, and Death, the skeleton, / And Time, the shadow;” and she does it almost perfectly. Yet again, while in the distant lands of France and Italy she remembers ‘Thy form, O Tree, as in my happy prime’ like ‘deathless trees’ those in Borrowdale⁹.

The incursion of the Casuarina tree into the Bengal landscape is for her and for all of us an important one. All these suggest the simultaneous coming together and breaking apart of languages that make that incursion possible. True, “Our Casuarina Tree was better than anything written up till then by an Indian in English Language” (Choudhury Rosinka 67).

3.3.1 Structure and Style

‘Our Casuarina Tree’ is perhaps the first satisfying example of those texts in Indian writing in English that occupy the space between translation and transformation. In its transition from one of the five senses to another, from the visual to the auditory, from the ‘crimson clusters’ to the sweet songs of birds and bees, the analogy rehearses the poems own act of translation; its movement from English to her country home and back again. The incorporation of the local word ‘*kokilas*’ in the frame of a Wordsworth-like poem¹⁰ illustrates her spontaneous outpour of thoughts and desires, and this finds its reflection in her simple and transparent frame of language that startles us with its resonance — ‘And far and near *Kokila*’s hail the day’.

It opens the way to further such usage in Indian writing in English. There cannot be any denial that the *Ballads* brought Toru home to rest in a world of her own. The *Ballads* that undoubtedly form the most matured of her writings constitutes Toru’s chief legacy to posterity. And ‘Our Casuarina Tree’ that immortalises the recaptured past is what E.J. Thomson says: “the most remarkable poem ever written in English by a foreigner” (Sengupta 86).

The use of imagery in the poem where the auditory and the visual becomes one is an unfaltering reminiscence, her persistent recollection of her likings for French literature. T. S Eliot in one of his essays said that the kind of poetry he needed to teach him the use of his own voice did not exist in English at all; it was only to be found in French. The same could be said of Dutt in her desire to find her voice in English and exploring new territory

and a variety of languages and literary traditions. These transactions are still not understood and perhaps can never be understood.

In her vision of the Casuarina tree, Toru poised between English and French, and returned to her enthralling childhood in Bengal. These transactions are so impeccably versed and fit in so perfectly into the structure of the poem that one could undeniably say Toru Dutt achieved “the concretisation of something as amorphous as nostalgia in her best-known poem, *Our Casuarina Tree*” (Parthasarathy 32). The tree so recalled is a symbol, a representation of time and perpetuity and a commemorative tree, the memory of which blinds her eyes with ‘hot-tears’.

The memory of the recaptured tree is beautifully versed in five stanzas; each stanza with eleven lines, form with the rhyme scheme¹¹ often used by Keats himself. Again, Keats’s poetry is characterised by an exuberant love of the language and a rich, sensuous imagination. This is almost true of Toru. At least certain aspects get revealed as we scan through the stanzas. The first stanza is an objective description of the tree; the second connects the tree to Tom’s own feeling of it at different times; the third associates the tree with Toru’s memories of her lost brother and sister; the fourth gives a human shape to the tree, for its lament is a human recordation of pain and disappointment; and the fifth stanza resolves as it were the immortality of the tree.

In the organisation of the eleven-line stanzas, the finish of the individual stanzas and the poem as a whole, ‘*Our Casuarina Tree*’ can claim its place as a superb piece of writing; in its mastery of phrase and rhythm and in its music of sound and ideas, the “poem alone can number her with the deathless English poets of her time” (Sengupta 86). It reveals both the unique loveliness of the Indian scene and the freshness of vision with which it is perceived. Rightly, Gokak remarks: “Indianness of theme, utter authenticity and consummate self-revelation reach their high water-mark of excellence in Toru Dutt’s ‘*Our Casuarina Tree*’ (xxiii).

3.3.2 Questions

1. *Our Casuarina Tree* is perhaps the first satisfying example of those texts in Indian writing in English that occupy the space between translation and transformation. Do you agree? Analyse with reference to the poem.

2. In her use of imagery and her thinking she returned to her 'idyllic childhood' in the land of her birth. Examine the statement critically, referring to the poem.
3. *Our Casuarina Tree* is "the most remarkable poem ever written in English by a foreigner". Do you think the appreciation is correct?
4. Casuarina tree is "both tree and symbol, and in it are implicated both time and eternity". Explain with reference to the poem.

3.3.3 Notes

1. The early death of her brother Abju, and her sister-friend Aru and several death threats that the poet experienced at an immature age pressurised her so often, could be the reason why Toru was so advertently apprehensive of life in earth — our transient life in earth, where 'Fear' overshadowed the 'hope that is trembling' and those times of her 'happy prime'.
Toru's letter to Mary Martin at Cambridge reveal her childlike joy in life with her intellectual maturity. They speak of 'flowers' and 'birds' and of her 'artistic vision', scholarly pursuits and also of her 'morbid illness'.
2. The line is taken from a sonnet written by Govin Chunder on the death of his son Abju. Toru had a similar faith and hence quoted.
3. Negative Capability: "*I mean **Negative Capability**, that is when man is capable of being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts without any irritable reaching after fact & reason*" John Keats.
4. Casuarina: The name 'Casuarina' is derived from the Latin word '*casuarius cassowary*', from fancied resemblance of the branches to the feathers of the bird.
5. Water-wraith: a dead spirit, remembered from "*The Braes of Yarrow*" by John Logan (1748-1788) and William Wordsworth's "*Yarrow Visited September, 1814*".
6. Kokilas: Koels (plural), "A cuckoo of the genus *Eudynamis*, especially the *E. honorata* of India". It is also sometimes termed as "the nightingale of Hindustan".

7. Broad tank: used for storage of drinking water.
8. Yew-Trees: In 1803 William Wordsworth may well have sat under this tree and taken notes for a poem entitled *Yew Trees*, certainly the lines show a good observational understanding of the yew's main features and they express the timelessness and indestructible qualities of these old trees.

Wordsworth refers to the "fraternal four" in the poem but only three are left today; one was blown down in a storm in 1883. There is another old yew directly below, by the river. The biggest tree is hollow enough to stand inside and its roots seem to be gracefully enveloping the shattered rocks around it.
9. Borrowdale: the Borrowdale valley and lake, near Keswick, Cumbria, in the Lake district, of which Wordsworth writes in "*Yew-trees*", the poem that suggested Toru the theme of "*Our Casuarina Tree*".
10. Wordsworth-like poem: One based on the "real language of men" and which avoids the poetic diction of much eighteenth-century poetry. Toru's spontaneous outpour of thoughts and desires are reflected in her simple and transparent frame of language.
11. Rhyme scheme: abba,cddc,eee.

3.4 The Lotus : An Analysis

Love came to Flora asking for a flower
That would of flowers be undisputed queen,
The lily and the rose, long, long had been
Rivals for that high Honour, Bards of power
Had sung their claims. 'The rose can never tower
Like the pale lily with her Juno mien'—
'But is the lily lovl'ier?' Thus between
Flower-factions rang the strife in Psyche's bower.
Give me a flower delicious as the rose
And stately as the lily in her pride'—
But of what colour?'—'Rose-red,' Love first chose,
Then prayed,—'No, lily-white,—or, both provide';
And Flora gave the lotus, 'rose-red' dyed,
And 'lily-white',—the queenliest flower that blows.

'The Lotus' is one of the last few poems of Toru Dutt included in the **Miscellaneous Poems**, published at the end of the *Ancient Ballads And The Legends Of Hindustan*. It is naturally a sophisticated rendition of Toru, when she has overcome all the contradictions she encountered- religious, social or personal. She is now delving deep into her inner vision simply writing poems in her seclusion as by now she has already contracted consumption. She is no more tussling to negotiate the cross-cultural complexities resulting from the Indian-European encounter. No longer does she wish to compete with her European contemporaries or even attempt to compete with European Literature on her own ground. 'The Lotus' is one such poem that exemplifies her precocious craftsmanship and a reflection of her fertile, uninterrupted imagination, uninhabited by the growth of the intellectual reform or the religious reorganisation that took place in the nineteenth century India. In her hands, Gokak observe — "Genuine lyric poetry, both of the Romantic and Victorian type, came fully into its own..." (Gokak xx). In the annals of Indo-Anglian poetry this sonnet of Toru, 'The Lotus', along with few other poems, occupy a distinctive place of its own.

Love¹ came to Flora² asking for a flower
 That would of flowers be undisputed queen,
 The Lily and the rose, long, long had been
 Rivals for that high honour. Bards of power
 Had sung their claims. 'The rose can never tower
 Like the pale lily with her Juno³ mien'—
 'But is the lily lovl'ier?' Thus between
 Flower-factions rang the strife in Psyche's⁴ bower.
 'Give me a flower delicious as the rose
 And stately as the lily in her pride'—
 'But of what colour?'— 'Rose-red', Love first chose,
 Then prayed,— 'No, lily-white,— or, both provide';
 And Flora gave the lotus⁵, 'rose-red' dyed,
 And 'lily-white',— the queenliest flower that blows.

The poem describes the exquisiteness of flowers Lotus, Rose, Lily, one that outlives the beauty of the other in its 'queenliest' form, and yet a search for the 'undisputed' queen of flowers as "Love came to Flora asking for a flower/ That would of flowers be undisputed queen". The God of 'Love', Cupid, comes to Flora, the Goddess of flowers, asking for a flower of nonpareil beauty. But what flower of unequalled beauty could Flora give? Here the intricacy of the poem rises to an inconceivable height as Flora desires to win over the heart of 'Love' from Psyche, the beloved of Cupid. For this, thoughts debate each other in Flora's mind. She contemplates, like the 'lily' the 'rose' will never be as great in plumage and as towering as the Goddess Juno. But again, can the 'lily' beat the 'rose' in a battle of beauty? The praises of honour of each flower rivalled one another in the shelter of Flora's mind and 'rang the strife in Psyche's bower'. Psyche is a maiden (in Roman myth) who becomes the wife of Cupid and is made immortal because of her love- 'true love' for Cupid. So to win his love Flora has to give him a flower of 'undisputed' grace.

The 'lily' and the 'rose', for long are 'Rivals for that high honour', being the queens of flowers. 'Bards of power' have sung their enticing beauty forever. So it is difficult for Flora even being a goddess of flowers, to conceive of a flower as gorgeous as rose and as queenly as lily; and the colour 'Rose-red' that 'Love first chose', or 'lily-white' or both. But Flora's love for Cupid is

proved. 'Lotus', the sovereign of all came to be. Both 'rose-red' and 'lily-white' that emerge as the pink Lotus, 'the queenliest flower that blows', is Flora's gift of love. It is undoubtedly an exquisite creation of Toru that remains unmatched in the English poems of Indo-Anglian literature. It reveals her unique freshness of vision that makes the poem almost unparalleled.

3.4.1 Structure and Style

In '21*The Lotus*', Toru unburden her intimate joys and sorrows in 'a simple and transparent style' that gives a liveliness to the poem all its own. Structurally a Petrarchan sonnet⁶, 'The Lotus' is a sure representation of multiculturalism, an amalgamation of various traditions and myths. It is a unique poem in which the Hindu faith, the Buddhist faith, the Greek and the Roman mythology all merge into one. It proves her craftsmanship that is so neat and yet so complex and again so transparent that it could render an exquisite finish to the poem.

It is known that the form 'sonnet' had come to Toru from the English literary tradition. But the wonderful ensemble in the poem has opened a new vista unknown to the English language before. The sort of rhetorical expression that Dutt uses in this poem in which she compares a colour to taste: 'Give me a flower delicious as the rose... 'But of what colour?'— 'Rose-red',... 'No, lily-white—', shows her knowledge of French symbolist poetry⁷. Again the incursion of the mythological figures that runs so smoothly in the poem calls for appreciation. It does not imp' at all and at the same time is almost inspired. As the poem goes it seems so simple, yet the litany to Flora, 'asking for a flower that would of flowers be undisputed queen' makes the poem all the more complex. Till the eighth line the graceful beauty of lily and rose are suggestive. From the ninth line there is a sudden intrusion of the auditory:

'Give me a flower delicious as the rose
And stately as the lily in her pride'—
'But of what colour?'— 'Rose-red', Love first chose,
Then prayed,— 'No, lily-white,— or, both provide'.

Again the thirteenth and the fourteenth line are suggestive of the greatness of Flora's love.

And Flora gave the lotus, 'rose-red' dyed,
And 'lily-white',— the queenliest flower that blows.

A turning point, "volta", occurs between the octave — the first eight lines, and the sestet — the next six line:

...Thus between
Flower-factions rang the strife in Psyche's bower.

The first three lines of the sestet reflect on the theme and the last three lines bring the whole poem to a close. Flora creates a flower and gives 'Love' the pink Lotus, 'the queenliest flower that blows'. On the whole it can be said that Toru is successful in crafting the Petrarchan style in her sonnet 'The Lotus'. It is an expression of her passionate desire, her immediate sensations of human experience and the inner life, through the subtle and suggestive use of highly metaphorical language, in the form of symbols. Not a barren imitation, it is a manifestation of the inner vision, her authentic inspiration that could only be suggested. "To name is to destroy, to suggest is to create," said Mallarmé, the great French symbolist. And this sonnet of Toru is essentially the same. It is intensely personal; it leans more heavily on oblique suggestions and evocations than on overt statements.

The transaction of symbolic colours and varied literary traditions blend so well in this verse of fourteen lines that in spite of redundant use of adjectives for which Toru is often criticised to keep up with the rhythm and unnecessary use of punctuations — commas, dashes and semi-colons, the poem definitely shows a growth in the literary tradition of 'Indian Writing in English'. The unique beauty of Lotus has acquired a symbolic significance in the poem. It suggests purity of Flora's love for Cupid. Lotus is a symbol of purity and Flora's love for Cupid is as unique and as pure as the Lotus. With a wonderful combination of a highly metaphorical language and an explicit Petrarchan style of versification 'The Lotus' has attained a place of distinction. It is a poem, which is intense and complex, with condensed syntax and symbolic imagery and yet creating music through words. It leaves us baffled as we wonder what level Toru and her poetry could have attained had she lived longer.

3.4.2 Questions :

1. Describe *'The Lotus'* as a manifestation of Toru's inner vision, 'her authentic inspiration that could only be suggested'.
2. *'The Lotus'* is 'truly a Petrarchan sonnet'. Justify the statement analysing the poem.
3. The poem 'definitely shows a growth in the literary tradition of Indian writing in English'. Justify analysing the poem *'The Lotus'*.
4. 'She is no more tussling to negotiate the cross-cultural complexities' It is a genuine lyric poetry that occupy a place of its own. Explain drawing reference from the poem *'The Lotus'*.

3.4.3 Notes

1. Love: In this sonnet 'Love' suggest the Roman god of love, son of Venus; it is identified with the Greek god Eros.
2. Flora: Roman goddess of flowers and spring.
3. Juno: Wife of Jupiter in Roman myth; queen of the gods and goddesses of marriage: identified with the Greek goddess Hera, wife of Zeus.
4. Psyche: In Roman myth is a maiden who becomes the beloved of Cupid and is made immortal.
5. Lotus: Water lily, Egyptian and Asian. Associated in Hindu and Buddhist thought with meditation and spiritual health.

This unique flower has been a persistent motif in Indian poetry, mythology and sculpture since very ancient times. Apart from the beauty of its petals and the variety of its colours — white, pink, red, light blue, the lotus has acquired many symbolic associations. It suggests purity. Born in a muddy pool, it remains clean, unsoiled. Water does not cling to the petals or leaves of a lotus flower.

The lotus is equally important in the Buddhist tradition. The Buddha is shown meditating upon a lotus-throne.

6. Petrarchan Sonnet: The Petrarchan sonnet, also known as the Italian sonnet, originated in Italy in the 13th Century and was associated with the Italian poet Petrarch. Francesco Petrarca is usually credited with having introduced lyric poetry in Europe. Petrarch's "Canzonieri," a

sequence of poems including 317 sonnets, established the sonnet as a major form in European poetry. It is a sonnet in its classic form and tends to split into two sections, known as octave (eight line stanza) and sestet (six line stanza). The octave has two quatrains, rhyming a-b-b-a, a-b-b-a; the first quatrain presents the theme, the second develops it. The sestet is built on two or three different rhymes, arranged either c-d-e-c-d-e or c-d-c-d-c-d or c-d-e-d-c-e; The first three lines reflect on the theme and the last three lines bring the whole poem to a close, but without a final rhymed couplet. The octave usually presents an idea, raises an argument, makes a proposition, or poses a problem. A turning point occurs between the octave and the sestet, and the sestet develops out of the octave by illustrating the idea in the octave, varying it, responding to it, or solving the problem it poses.

Rhyme scheme in *The Lotus* is almost similar: abba, abba, in the octave and cdc, ddc in the sestet. Only the last two lines do not match with the original alternatives. Perhaps this was an intentional trial.

7. French symbolist poetry: The Symbolist poetic movement originated with a group of French poets in the late 19th century. The underlying philosophy of the symbolists was a conviction that the transient objective world is not true reality, but a reflection of the invisible Absolute. The movement was a revolt against the realistic and naturalistic poetic styles of the day, which were designed to capture the transient. Their poetry also emphasized the importance of the sound of the verse, creating music through words.

The movement reached its peak around 1890, and its popularity declined at the beginning of the next century. The influence of Symbolism on later movements however is vast. The experimental techniques devised by these poets enriched the technical repertoire of modernism, particularly the works of W.B. Yeats, Ezra Pound, T.S. Eliot, and Wallace Stevens. Free verse, the creation of the symbolists, is now the dominant form of contemporary poetry. Any attempt to define the Symbolist movement and its influence inevitably loses itself in a welter of detail. One can say that these late nineteenth-century French poets were revolting against fixed forms and inert molds; that they were attempting to express an inner ideal reality rather than the

objective world; that they deliberately blurred sense impressions and sought correspondences where none had been observed before.

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3.4.5 A Biographical Chronology

- 1856, 4 March : Toru Dutt was born at Rambagan, 12 Manicktala Street, (now Romesh Datta Street) Kolkata. She was the youngest of the three children of Govin Chunder and Kshetramoni.
- 1862 : The family embrace s Christianity.
- 1862-1869 : Studies at home along with Abju and Aru, under the guidance of a private tutor. Of course Govin Dutt himself took a part in their education and carefully supervised their studies.
- 1865 : Toru’s Elder brother Abju dies. The sisters cling closer together than ever before. They read Paradise Lost repeatedly and generally lost themselves in literary studies.
- 1869 : They left for Europe with parents and sister Aru. They reach England and take a furnished house. Then they stay in France where Toru and her sister Aru start going to a French school at Nice.
- 1870 : *The Dutt Family Album* published.
- 1871 : Comes Back to England. The sisters start attending “High Lectures for Women” in Cambridge and make friends with Mary Martin, who was Toru’s life-long friend and the recipient of most of her letters.
- 1873 September : The family returns to their city house in Rambagan and their garden residence at Baugmaree.
- 1874, 23 July : Toru’s elder sister dies of consumption. Toru writes to Mary Martin “Lord has taken Aru from us .. .It is a sore trial for us, but His will be done”.
- 1875-76 : Toru determined to make a “sheaf of poems for her native culture starts to learn Sanskrit. Although darkened now and then by the memory of a lost brother and of a lost sister and though ill herself, she writes her Ancient Ballads and Legends at this time.
- 1876 March : *A Sheaf Gleaned in French Fields* published. Kolkata: Saptahik Sambad, Bhowanipur. (It is a translation of

poems from French to English; of the 165 pieces, 8 were by Aru. Toru has also added notes on the French poets represented in the volume).

- 1877, 30 August : Toru dies of consumption. Buried at CMS Cemetery, Kolkata.
- 1878 : The second edition of the *Sheaf* reprinted; edited by Govin Dutt.
A novel *Bianca* or *The Young Spanish Maiden*, published; Kolkata: Bengal Magazine between January-April.
- 1879 : A novel in French *Le Journal de Mademoiselle d' Arvers* published; Paris. (It was hailed as "an extraordinary feat, without precedent" and compared to *Vathek* of Beckford).
- 1880 : The third edition of the *Sheaf* published; with a foreword by Arthur Symons. London: Kegan Paul.
- 1882 : *Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan* published; with an introduction by Edmund Gosse. London: Kegan Paul.
- 1927 : *Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan* reprinted. Madras: Kalidas.
- 1969 : The third edition of *Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan* published. Allahabad: Kitabstan.

Unit 4 Nissim Ezekiel's Poetry

Structure

- 4.1. Objectives
- 4.2. Introduction : The Problems of Indian English Poetry
- 4.3. Periodization
- 4.4. Indian English Poetry—Pluses and Minuses
- 4.5. Nissim Ezekiel (1924-2004)—Life and Career
- 4.6. Ezekiel's Achievement—A Survey
- 4.7. Marriage : An Analysis
- 4.8. Night of the Scorpion : An Analysis
- 4.9. Goodbye Party for Miss Pushpa T. S. : An Analysis
- 4.10. Questions
- 4.11. References

4.1. Objectives

In this unit we shall deal with three poems by Nissim Ezekiel, arguably the most important of the post-Independence poets in Indian English. He is also a very strong influence on the next generation of poets and possibly the most recognised and respected abroad. You have to study his 'Marriage', 'Night of the Scorpion' and 'Goodbye Party for Miss Pushpa T.S'. Taken from three different published titles, they represent different facets of Ezekiel the poet.

4.2. Introduction : The Problems of Indian English Poetry

When Indians, growing proficient in English under British colonial rule first began to use the language creatively, most of the first generation of Indian English writers turned to the writing of poetry. Numerically as well as qualitatively, the poets of the 19th century score over the fiction writers, if not the writers of non-fictional prose, which reached very great heights. Some writers, like Sri Aurobindo and Rabindranath Tagore doubled as poets and prose writers. And yet even after a century and a half of its existence, there

are still articulated and unarticulated questions about the standard, and even the *raison d'être* of English poetry written by Indians.

Poetry, it has to be conceded, much more than any other literary genre, depends on the exploration of the vital spirit of a living language in order to come alive, to be worth anything at all. Can genuine, truly living poetry be written in a situation where the poet does not have the rhythm and nuances of the spoken speech in his ears. D. H. Lawrence has said that all creative art must arise out of a specific soil and flicker with a spirit of place. P. Lal in his Introduction to *Modern Indian Poetry in English* says, "It is essential that we write about life and values around us—what we see and what we feel, what gods and goddesses excite our conscious and subconscious'. And, while strongly criticising the derivative, imitative, often mushy style of earlier poets, Lal conceded that " Toru Dutt, Sarojini Naidu and Sri Aurobindo—whatever their weakness—have this great strength in common, that, in varying degrees, they have Indian responses to life and things."

But the problem—a major one for all Indian creative writers who write in English lucidly summed up by Raja Rao in the oft-quoted extract from his Foreward in *Kanthapura* ("One has to convey in a language not one's own, the spirit that is one's own.") is even more potent for poets. Two major literary critics have raised questions about first, the authenticity, and second, the Indianness of Indian English poetry. Buddhadeb Bose, the well-known Bengali poet and academic wrote the entry on "Indian poetry in English" in the *Concise Encyclopaedia of English and American Poets* edited by Stephen Spender and Donald Hall (1963). I quote below excerpts from it.

"...what circumstances led to this inconceivable loss of a mother tongue, or whether they had abjured it voluntarily, cannot be ascertained; but this section (i.e. Indians who write in English) has in the present day produced a new group who are assiduously courting the muse of Albion....To the question, "why in English?" They give various answers, one of them being that English is an Indian language—which it is not—another being that English entitles them to a larger audience. The fact is that the larger audience. The fact is that the "Indo-Anglians" do not have a real public in India, where literature is defined in terms of the different native languages, and their claim can be justified only by appreciation in England or the United States...As for the present day Indo-Anglians, they are earnest and not without talent, but it is difficult

to see how they can develop as poets in a language which they have learnt from books and seldom hear spoken in the streets or in their own homes, and whose two great sources lie beyond the seven seas. A poet must have the right to change and recreate language, and this no foreigner can ever acquire. As late as 1937 Yeats reminded Indian writers that "no one can think or write with music and vigour except in his mother tongue".

P.Lal, in his 'Introduction' to *Modern Indian Poetry in English* challenged Bose's critique and also his preference for 19th century poets like Toru Dutt, Sri Aurobindo, Sarojini Naidu over the present day Anglian poets. In writing what he called a "credo" for modern Indian English poetry he retorted that, 1) A poet could use a vital language (implying any vital language) he felt free to choose to write in (2) Poetry must deal in concrete terms with concrete experience. free propaganda and imitation.

But the question posed by Bose refuses to go away. David McCutcheon (*Indian Writing in English, Writers Workshop 1969*) has argued that there is nothing striking by way of Indianness in India-Anglian Poetry, on account of a serious and genuine lack of a well-established tradition:

"Now times have changed. The profession of English today receives British Council and U.S. invitations to lecture or research in British or American Universities, and even at home he may find many a companion: But it is still inevitable that Indian poets writing in English should be largely conditioned by English sensibility... If they were fluent enough to absorb the vernacular tradition, it is unlikely they would write in English. In spite of a certain desire to be Indian (or to be 'themselves' as they would say), they are bound by the fashions of the modern west. They have absorbed Eliot, Walter de la Mare, just as their 19th century predecessors followed Byron and Tennyson—and now they are absorbing Thom Gunn. To this they would retort with a good deal of truth that the vernacular writers are equally dependent on the west... And in fact modern Bengali poetry has been strikingly influenced by such European poets as Baudelaire, Valery, Eliot, Rilke. As for the younger generation of Bengali poets, since the visit of Allen Ginsberg their inspiration lies with the Beats."

In his review of modern Indo-Anglian poetry, McCutcheon goes on to say:

“There is little that is specifically Indian in the background and imagery; the rivers and mountains are all generalised, and ‘international flowers are preferred...The predilection for apples, which few Indians can see growing, let alone live with suggests literary sources. The themes and attitudes too are modern European .Alienation and resentment, of a hated machine age ...this is the modern world...increasingly standardized in every country.”

V.S. Naipaul draws conclusions similar to McCutcheon’s in *An Area of Darkness* when he declares that “Shiva has ceased to dance” in India. One of the Indo-Anglian poets, K. N. Subramanyam, rather surprisingly, expresses the poem I quote below (‘Situation’, *The Time of India*, June 12, 1980).

Introduced to
the Upanishads
by T.S. Eliot;
and to Tagore
by the earlier Pound;
and to the Indian
dance by
Bowers;
and to Indian
art by
what’s his-name
and to the Tamil
classics by
Danielou
(was he Pope?)
Vociferous in
thoughts not
his own;
Eloquent in
words not
his own.
(The age demanded)...

The controversy remains unresolved. But in the meanwhile a very respectable number of poets defy the questions and write poetry in English. Some among

them are bilingual , creating poetry in English and also their native tongue. Read Kamala Das's 'An Introduction' for poet's reply to these polemics.

4.3. Periodization

One of the main complaints critics like McCutcheon or Buddhadeb Bose made against Indian English literature in general and poetry in particular was the absence of a literary tradition which contemporary practice of the craft of writing can be based on, and with reference to which it can validate itself. As literature goes, Indian English literature is still very young. Still, primarily motivated by post independence academics, a periodization i.e. dividing the literature of around two centuries into phases or time-slots has been achieved. Even here we shall notice, that there is a certain parallel to literary movements taking place in the West. But there is always a time lag. For example, the shift to modernist idiom that happened in the west in the 1920s, begins to be noticed in Indian English poetry only around the 1950s. However this kind of delayed follow up is characteristic not only of Indian English poetry. We can see it happening in other colonial or postcolonial literatures as well.

Makrand Paranjpe, in his edited anthology, *Indian Poetry in English* has suggested three major period divisions or phases of this poetry: i) 1825-1900, the 19th century he names "Colonialism". Elsewhere he has also called it the 'protonationalist phase'. Starting with Derozio and including Toru Dutt and others, it corresponds to that period in Indian History when nationalism was being gradually consolidated, ii) The period 1900-1950 Paranjpe calls "nationalism" or the 'nationalist phase'. In this period we have Sri Aurobindo, Sarojini Naidu Tagore, etc. Noticeably, the poets were all engaged in battle against colonial rule. iii) 1950-1980. This period Paranjpe calls "Modernism". This is the post-nationalist phase in which poets like Nissim Ezekiel not only retreat from large public themes like nationalism, into individual and private agonies, but also sneer at the style and manner of the earlier poetry and show a greater consciousness of craftsmanship. P.Lal, in the "Introduction" earlier referred to, castigated Sri Aurobindo's 'Savitri' as "Slushy verse" "greasy, weak-spined and purple-adjecived "spiritual" poetry, and said that such nebulosity is pernicious for Indian poetry in English, which has to establish roots in rocky ground." Paranjpe calls the phase from 1980 to the

present “Postmodernism”, inaugurated by Vikram Seth we begin to see a new diasporic consciousness dominating Indian English poetry. From the 1960s, an interesting shift came about. Instead of being dominated by the hitherto monolithic tradition of British poetry, contemporary American poetry began to interest and influence the new generation. Allen Ginsberg, during his sojourn in India helped to build a bridge between the American cultural underground and the Indian avant-garde. There are many similarities between Beat poetry and the poetry of some Indo-Anglian poets like Prithvi Nandy and Arvind Mehrotra. The latter’s ‘Bharatmata : A Prayer’ is an interesting Indian beat poem:

“I am so used to your cities with a chain reaction of suburbs where whole families live in bathrooms and generations are pushed out of skylights and the next one sticks out its head like a tapeworm through frozen slut.”

Several poets, notably Shiv Kumar and Kamala Das were inspired by American confessional poetry to venture to subjects which were disturbing and considered taboo so far. Nissim Ezekiel, an elder poet, was also influenced to relax into free verse and began experimenting with “found poems”, “poster poems” etc. Increasingly, since the 60s, the prosody of Indian English poetry has followed the modes of American free verse as it has developed since the appearance of the Black Mountain School. The organic line, dictated by the breath, determines the prosodic texture, not the counting of syllables and accents. In the free verse of poets A.K. Ramanujan, R. Pathasarathy, A. Kolkatkar etc, as in American free verse, the image is all-important.

4.4 Indian English Poetry—Pluses and Minuses

During the 1960s polemical battle with Buddhadeb Bose, P.Lal circulated a questionnaire among fellow poets, inviting response to Bose’s critique, which he later published in the Writers Workshop 1969 edition of *Modern Indian Poetry in English*. The questions deserve our attention :

- 1) What are the circumstances that led to your using the English language for the purpose of writing poetry?

- 2) What are your views on the “Indo-Huglian” background?
- 3) “Do you think English is one of the Indian languages?”
- 4) Do you feel that you have a “real public in India?”
- 4) Do you feel that you have a “real public in India?”
- 5a) In your opinion, is it essential that a good poet should change and recreate the language?
- b) How do you think a poet acquires—assuming—that the needs to acquire —“the right to change and recreate language”?
- (c) Can an Indian poetry in English discharge the function of changing and recreating?

One interesting point that emerged from the polemics was the all-India character of Indian English poetry. In 1960, Lal had argued in the second issue of the Writers Workshop journal, *The Miscellany*, that poetry language is bound to be regional, only the writing in English can acquire an “Indian” character. Meenakshi Mukherjee, in her “In Search of Critical Strategies” (essay in *The eye of the Beholder*, London 1983) argues:

“What it means to be an Indian is not a question that troubles the Marathi or Bengali writer very much...The need to define oneself and analyse the specific elements of one’s cultural identity is usually the consequence of coming in contact with another’s culture. The writer in the Indian languages does not often have an exposure to another culture with sufficient intensity to worry about the problems.”

While both Lal and Mukherjee are overstating their case, The growth of Indian English poetry can certainly consider its accessibility to a pan-Indian and the overseas Indian readership as an important factor. Other factors are the active sponsorship of Indian English Literature by the departments of English in various Indian universities. This resulted in the inclusion of Indian English poets in the academic curriculum and the proliferation of voluminous dissertations on them. The quality of writing of the major poets, their ability to respond with sensitivity and intelligence to the changing cultural milieu in India have helped too. The growing urbanization had led to the English Language, often sprinkled with a good deal of vernacular words, becoming the language of everyday use, in the workplace and at home, of the upwardly mobile Indians. English, to all intents and purposes, seems to have evolved

from a language of colonial rulers to the language of the modern Indian urban upper class.

However, while Indian English poetry appears to be firmly established, in contrast with 1950s, when Ezekiel published his own poems, P.Lal worked almost singlehandedly with his Writers Workshop poetry publications, and Dom Moraes published his poetry in England, it comes a poor second in comparison with the vast body of Indian English fiction and its much market. The picture becomes clear if we take a look at the magazines scenario. In the 1950s, *The Illustrated weekly of India*, under the editorship of an Irishman, C.R. Mundy provided a forum for contemporary poetry. Nissim Ezekiel founded *Quest* in 1955, which helped to make Indian English poetry part of contemporary culture. The six issues of *Poetry India (1966-67)* edited by Ezekiel marked a high point of Indian English poetry publication. In contrast, at the present moment no major magazine regularly publishes poetry. Publishers are not interested in bringing out slim volumes of poetry. Oxford University Press's India branch is almost alone in regularly publishing poets, although the number of copies is much smaller than for fiction. Clearing House of Mumbai has been recently bringing out a number of excellent volumes of poetry.

Leela Gandhi points out in her preface to Ezekiel's *Collected Poems* (oup), "Poetry never quite qualified qua genre (unlike novel of non-fictional prose) for the realist work of narrating the nation". Gandhi means by the last phrase that novels and non-fiction prose writing can address important socio-political issues in a way which is not within the purview of poetry. A cultural inheritance works in us which suspects Indian English poetry as much for being poetry as for being written in English. Ezekiel himself, and many other modern poets react against the nationalist critique (for eg what Buddhadeb Bose says) by developing the view that flight from blood, birth, family and nation allows for the germination of more cosmopolitan affinities, without excluding country: We shall discuss this concept in the context of Ezekiel's poetry more elaborately.

4.5. Nissim Ezekiel (1924-2004)—Life and Career

Nissim Ezekiel was born in Mumbai, in a Jewish family(Bene-Israel). The Bene-Israelis are a small community who speak mainly in English, with a

mixture of local language Marathi. He studied at Wilson college, Mumbai, did his M.A. from Bombay University. Then he went to the University of London to read Philosophy. After his return to India he became a journalist, serving in the editorial staff of several journals including *The Illustrated Weekly of India*, *Poetry-India* and was the founder-editor of *Quest*. He served in the Indian Chapter of PEN and worked for short periods in advertising and broadcasting. Later he took up a teaching job, first in Mithibai College, Mumbai, and then in the Department of English, University of Bombay, from where he returned as Professor. He continued journalistic work side by side with his teaching, as a regular columnist for *The Times of India*, and was active translator, playwright, reviewer.

Ezekiel is considered a poet's poet in Indian English Poetry, since after his return from London he was instrumental in ushering modernism in Indian English poetry with the publication of his first collection, appropriately named *A Time to Change* (1952). Ezekiel carefully nurtured many of the poets centred in Mumbai. Noteworthy among them are Dom Moraes, Adil Jussawala and Gieve Patel. Bruce King, in his *Modern Indian Poetry in English* says, "Of the group of poets attempting to create a modern English poetry in India, Nissim Ezekiel soon emerged as the leader who advised others, set standards and created places of publication." Other Publications of Ezekiel are—*Sixty Poems*(1953), *The Third*(1958), *The Unfinished Man*(1960), *Poems*(1974), *Hymns in Darkness*(1976), *Latter-day Psalms* (1982)

4.6. Ezekiel's Achievement—A Survey

While it is broadly true that when Ezekiel returned to Mumbai from London he brought back a poetics that challenged the lyrical romanticism that had been the prevailing mode of pre-independence Indian English poetry, and replaced the mystical obscurantism of poets like Sri Aurobindo, Ezekiel's modernist affiliation is also a little exaggerated. Many poems in *A Time to Change*, for example the title poem itself and *Something to Pursue* reflect a deep religious sensibility. There is much formal verse in this volume—a strict adherence to rhyme schemes and prosodic rules. Indian English poetry's transition from romantic to modern was not a sudden leap, nor was Indian modernism a single, simple, monolithic phenomenon. It was a slow-developing complex of many attitudes and idioms.

The important elements Ezekiel introduced are—a precise use of language, well-crafted images, an ironic stance and an urbanity. His ears are finely honed to the nuances of the English language. He also introduced a whole new range of subjects to Indian English poetry, turning its focus away from nature, spirituality, Indian myths and rural life. His non-Hindu/Muslim a certain lack of native roots because of his Judeo-Christian background, helped to foster the spirit of modern cosmopolitanism in his writings. In shifting the focus of poetry to the sprawling, teeming metropolis of Mumbai, in being a Bombay poet first and an Indian poet afterwards, Ezekiel added a dimension to Indian modernism. This led to whole new movement in Indian English poetry and the poets with close links to it are sometimes referred to as the Bombay School.

It *A Time to Change* shows a religious preoccupation cropping up through motifs of redemption, rebirth, the concern with spiritual wholeness, in the next volume, *Sixty Poems* we still find moral concerns couched in a plainness of style. In *A Poem of Dedication* he uses the Biblical *Ecclesiastes* imagery of seasonal change as an expression of the organic :

Both poetry and living illustrate
A time to act, a time to contemplate.

In *The Third* he has developed a more personal manner. The rhymes begin to play on clichés, idioms and sayings. There is the modern use of odds and ends of colloquial speech. T. S. Eliot's influence is evident. Ezekiel also learnt from Yeats the art of writing poems of personal experience while standing at a distance. The poems show a personal of mature wisdom, although at the time Ezekiel was only 35, The problem and disappointments of marriage become a major theme along with physical temptation and an awareness of repressed deep emotions.

Always the body knows its nakedness.
The first baptism is not in water
But in fire.

The Unfinished Man with its title from Yeat's poem has some of Ezekiel's best poetry. The title indicates a shift in his poetic manner—from intellectual

equipoise to a time of incompleteness, a sense of personal purgatory. Its ten poems make a sequence about the discontents of an apparently settled life . The poet persona asks whether he is—

...among the men of straw
who think they go which way they please?

(*A Morning Walk*)

The last poem, Jamini Roy offers the painter as an example of someone who found a solution to

Adult fantasies
Of sex and power-ridden lives.

The poet suggests that an art of assent, rather than hostility, and rising above one's self to give voice to the people might be an answer to an artists (poet's) dilemma—

He started with a different style
He travelled, so he found his roots.
His rage became a quiet smile
Prolific in its proper fruits.

The *Unfinished Man* is remarkable its self-scrutiny and polished craft. the verse is regular, obeying the rules of traditional metre. Variety is created by various juxtapositions of ideas and images. P. Lal, in his foreword said, "...The banal line, so clear and pure that it is almost prosy, hides, in Ezekiel's hands, angel's wings under its deceptive stone. No tinklings, no gongs; the English language used nobly, surely, flowing in subtle music, flashing in bright, disciplined image.

The vision desired in *Jamini Roy* seems to emerge in *The Exact Name* (1965). The poem *Philosophy* rejects the intellectual analysis which destroys the reality of experience. *The Night of the Scorpion* shows a new direction, dealing with commonplace Indian reality. The poems use more unrhymed verse, become poetry of the speaking voice.

After his break with Writers Workshop Ezekiel did not publish a new volume for 11 years. The next phases of his work represented by the collection *Hymns in Darkness Latter-Day Psalms. Background, Casually (HID)* is a verse autobiography tracing what he thought to be main stages of his life. Long by

Ezekiel's standards, this 75-line, poem in 3 parts portrays his uneasy relationship with India, his home. He goes to a Catholic school, is despised by Christian classmates and doesn't get on well with Hindus or Muslims either; The Sojourn abroads, with Philosophy, poetry and poverty for companion"; Not making much of a success, he returns home, descends into the inevitable drudgery of marriage and earning a living. There gradually emerges a sense of acceptance of his limitation,—a reconciliation that is half ironic and half stoical :—

"The Indian landscape sears my eyes.
I have become a part of it.

...
I have made my commitment now,
This is one: to stay where I am.
My backward place is where I am.

According to Ezekiel's biographer R.Raj Rao, he went to the Rotterdam Poetry Festival in 1978 without any books, and so his only reading matter was a copy of the Gideon Bible in his hotel room. The Bible psalms gave him another source of poetry. *The Latter. Day Psalms* shows Ezekiel's increasing interest in his Jewish origin and heritage. But they also show his impatience with older forms of belief. "How long are we to rely/ on those marvellous things/ in ancient Egypt", or, "Is the Lord my shepherd/ Shall I not want?" With all the references to his Jewish heritage and Nazi holocaust (mass killing of Jews), Ezekiel, in his last poems still remains a postmodern man tumbling towards a provisional sense of identity.

4.7. Marriage : An Analysis

Lovers when they marry face
Eternity with touching grace.
Complacent at being fated
Never to be separated.
The bride is always pretty, the groom
A lucky man. The darkened room
Roars out the joy of flesh and blood.
The use of nakedness is good.

I went through this, believing all,
Our love denied the Primal Fall.
Wordless, we walked among the trees,
And felt immortal as the breeze.

However many times we came
Apart, we came together. The same
Thing over and over again.
Then suddenly the mark of Cain

Began to show on her and me.
Why should I ruin the mystery
By harping on the suffering rest,
Myself a frequent wedding guest?

Published in *The Unfinished Man* the poem is on one of the recurrent themes in Ezekiel's poetry. While the focus is on the problems and disappointments of marriage, the subject primarily urban, sense of a lack of commitment. I have already mentioned in Section 1.5 above that the 10 poems in *The Unfinished Man* form of sequence. They are thematically related, as each poem takes up the themes of discontent, failure and lack of will. 'Marriage' should be read alongside two other poems which come immediately before it, — 'Event' and 'Commitment'. 'Commitment' ends with a reference to men who "failed to count the growing cost/Of ceshly jobs or unloved wives." — in other words who opt for the socially accepted norms of life. 'Event' distinguishes between what is actually felt and acting according to ideas of what should be felt. The woman pretends to intellectual interests while she offers sex, because she thinks that is what he expects, while he is aware that both of them are living in "day-dreams...Reflections of the cheated mind."

'Marriage' sarcastically traces the progress of marriage from the paradisaical complacency of lovers who assume that marriage is a gateway to heaven, to their fall from grace. In *The Unfinished Man* Ezekiel continued the interesting stylistic development he had first shown in *The Third* — the poet persona is someone watching himself, as if he were a case study in bad faith. The persona is confessional, but in a distanced manner, almost, or fully ironic,

and not with the immediacy or candid *revelation* manner of Kamala Das. He approaches close to emotional turmoil, frustrated desire, but they are still carefully mediated by the art of poetry.

Stanza 1 : The couple, like Adam and Eve in a primal paradise, start their journey from a world of innocence. Surrounded by, and the centre of ceremonies and festivities, they think with a touching innocence that their love will last for ever. The marriage service, in all religious marriages, incorporates words to the effect that marriages are made in heaven, that the wedded couple are united for ever, to death and beyond. The couple believes the entire myth in their inexperience.

Stanza 2 : “The bride is always pretty”, “the groom a lucky man”—these observations are obviously the trite, facile and socially polite comments compliments usually made by outsiders or onlookers like the wedding guests (see also the reference in the last stanza). The rest of the second stanza ventures into one aspect of the reality of marriage. The physical pleasure of consummation, in its initial stage, is heady and intoxicating. The “joys of flesh and blood” “roar” the massage of pleasure. The verb conveys the strength of the pleasure.

Stanza 3 : Notice the shift in tense. The first 2 stanzas use the simple present as if the statements in them represent eternal, immutable truths. Here the poet’s persona directly enters the narration of experience. It is no longer a generalized, accepted version of things. The entry of the poet’s persona and the past tense verbs introduce a strong note of doubt and self-analysis. The experience of marriage is individualized. The poet’s persona had also believed that they had found on uncorrupted and incorruptible love. “Primal fall” refers to the Biblical story of Adam and Eve’s act of disobedience of the Divine Command (Book of genesis). As punishment they were expelled from paradise. According to Christian theological doctrine, the love that existed between the first man and first woman in their state of primal innocence was forever vitiated for their descendants as a result of the Fall. The lovers in ‘Marriage’ believed that they could “deny” the curse attendant on the children of Adam and Eve. The “walk along the trees” image invokes the garden of Eden, and the adjective “immortal, like the noun “eternity” in stanza 1 suggests

the lover's touching but deluded faith that their love will transcend time and decay.

Stanza 4 : It begins with a sexual innuendo, with a pun on the word "come" which also means reaching climax of sexual pleasure. The pleasure and excitement of sex in marriage (stanza 1) is followed by satiation. The repetitiveness of diurnal routine turned the relationship into a lifeless bondage. Rather than a sense of intimacy and unity, the sexual act results in separateness and monotony. The "mark of Cain" means the mark visible on a murderer because in the Bible story God put a mark on Cain after he had murdered his brother Abel (The Bible, *Book of Genesis*).

Stanza 5 : The end of stanza 4 runs into the beginning of stanza 5. The mark on Cain is to be seen both on the poet and his wife, since both are guilty of killing their love.

Then suddenly, in stanza 5, line 2 the poet persona shifts ground. In all his poems on marriage, one can sense that personal experience is being turned into poetry, but Ezekiel never wholly gave himself over to the confessional mode. He prefers to remain guarded, ironic, distant, analytical. Cryptically, with a touch of ironic humour, the poet refuses to reveal the agony of living in a loveless, dead marriage. Why should he ruin the mystique of marriage, he asks, taking an almost saturnine pleasure that other couples would be duped to undergo the same experience and be doomed. He, like others in society will conceal or at least suppress his personal agony, and at other weddings where he himself is the wedding guest, will utter the same trite clichés that the guests at his weddings had spoken (st. 2)

Versification : The verse of 'Marriage', as in the other poems of *The Unfinished Man* has a highly formalistic, rhymed, stanzaic style. The rhythm is a fairly regular 4-foot iambic, with little variation. The lines rhyme in couplets. The stanzas are syntactically self-complete except for the 4th, which runs onto the 5th. The verse is closed rather than open. The formal, structural closeness suggests an enclosing on emotions and channelling them towards well-thought, disciplined judgment. The last lines which pose a question and leave it unanswered, suggests that the dilemma of marriage does not have a ready solution. Though the terseness, wit and irony mark the poem, Ezekiel

shows how to avoid the excesses of romanticism when writing about the self and its concerns, making art based on autobiographical experience.

4.8. Night of the Scorpion : An Analysis

I remember the night my mother,
was stung by a scorpion. Ten hours
of steady rain had driven him
to crawl beneath a sack of rice.
Parting with his poison-flash
of diabolic tail in the dark room—
he risked the rain again
The peasants came like swarms of flies
and buzzed the Name of God a hundred times
to paralyse the Evil One.
With candles and with lanterns
throwing giant scorpion shadows
on the sun-baked walls
they searched for him : he was not found.
They clicked their tongues.
With every movement that the scorpion made
his poison moved in Mother's blood, they said.
May he sit still, they said.
May the sins of your previous birth
be burned away tonight, they said.
May your suffering decrease
the misfortunes of your next birth, they said.
May the sum of evil
balanced in this unreal world
against the sum of good
become diminished by your pain.
May the poison purify your flesh
of desire, and your spirit of ambition,
they said, and they sat around
on the floor with my mother in the centre,
the peace of understanding on each face.

More candles, more lanterns, more neighbours,
more insects, and the endless rain:
My mother twisted through and through
groaning on a mat.
My father, sceptic, rationalist,
trying every curse and blessing,
powder, mixture, herb and hybrid.
He even poured a little paraffin
upon the bitten toe and put a match to it.
I watched the flame feeding on my mother.
I watched the holy man perform his rites
to tame the poison with an incantation.
After twenty hours
it lost its sting.
My mother only said:
Thand God the scorpion picked on me
and spared my children.

This is one of the most famous and oftenest anthologised pieces. In most of Ezekiel's poems, The city of Mumbai is a metonym for the modern Indian experience. He rarely goes outside the surrounds of the city. 'Scorpion', published in *The Exact Name* (1965), is a rare example of his venture outside habitual urban terrain. Reading the poem at the University of North London in 1989, Ezekiel said that the incident narrated in it happened when he was about twelve years old. Obviously, it is an account of his parents' response to his mother being stung by a scorpion. The poem, one of the best examples of the commonplaces of Indian life made into art, was written in 1964, when Ezekiel was a visiting professor at Leeds University, England. The expatriate or exile always remembers more vividly a traditional world in contrast to the present. 'Scorpion' avoids the distanced self-consciousness, philosophical reflectiveness and formality of manner we find in the poems of *The Unfinished Man*. The free verse seems meant for oral delivery and the poem's beginning, without any hint of the tangential or the roundabout, immediately approaches the child's perspective – "I remember...". The poetry is created in a mundane reality as observed, known, felt, experienced, rather than by distancing the experience through intellect.

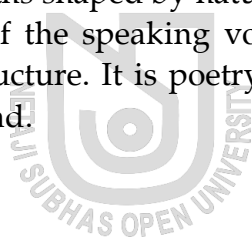
By juxtaposing the peasants, simple and superstitions with his 'sceptic, rationalist' father, Ezekiel shows the confrontation of two belief-systems in contemporary India. R. Partha Sarathi has pointed out that the poem evokes "superstitions practices that we still haven't outgrown". The poem first narrates the peasants' responses to the event (lines 8-33). The feel of Indian traditional ritual is conveyed through the incantatory rhythm repetitive phrases. "May he..." "...They said". the peasants identify the scorpion with evil "The Evil one". The repetitions enforce the mutualistic pattern of their activities : "May he sit still..." ; "May the sins..." ; "May the sum of evil...". Their speeches are all reported speech—"they said". His father's actions too are reported : "My father...put a match to it". The reported speeches and the past tense of the action verbs—"poured", "put", "twisted" put the event and the child's view of it within a historical frame of the mature narrator looking back while moving back and forth between past and present. The mature poet keeps out of the way except as a narrator providing the context—"I watched the flame...", "I watched the holy man..." A fine dramatic situation is created by contrasting the peasants' buzzing talk, clicking tongue, his mother's groans and twists, his father's frenzied activity, using every possible remedy including "powder, mixture, herb and hybrid".

After a day the poison is no longer felt, and in a final irony, his mother in contrast to the previous feverish activity centred upon her, makes a typical "motherly" comment : "Thank God the Scorpion picked on me/and scared my children," The "Thank God " is doubly ironic as it is a commonplace expression in speech, in contrast to all the previous religious and superstitious activity (The peasants incantation; the holy man's rites). However in spite of its ending, the poem is not about maternal devotion, or about the glory of Jewish or Indian motherhood .

The poem may be read on two planes. It is without doubt a fine dramatic rendering of Indian reality closely observed and narrated. The tone is enigmatic, non-judgmental. The neutral verse leaves a range of possible attitudes open. The circumstantial details (Ten hours of rain; sacks of rice stored; flash of tail in the dark room), and visually bright details (candles, lanterns, more candles, more lanterns, throwing giant scorpion shadows. The far flame his father lights by pouring paraffin; auditory details (buzzed the name of God, clicked their tongue etc) give a precisely realized verse account of a specific personal experience.

Another plane on which the poem operates has a wider and more general meaning relevant to contemporary India. It is a powerful, though sympathetic depiction of the conflict between rationality and superstition between two different belief systems coming into dialogue during a family crisis. The superstitious faith of the Hindu villagers influence his Jewish, modern father, because even as the villagers provide a chorus of commentaries on the consequences of a scorpions sting, which even embraces the afterlife, his father tries “every curse and blessing” along, with medicines. The poem can thus be read as a dramatization of an encounter between secular Indian rationalism and pre-modern Hindu faith.

Unlike the more formal poetry in *The Unfinished Man*, Ezekiel’s new interest in Indian reality is expressed through a different versification. It is unrhymed, with line lengths shaped by natural syntactic units, and a rhythm created by the cadence of the speaking voice, in a long verse paragraph, rather than in stanzaic structure. It is poetry to be spoken and heard rather than to be printed and read.



4.9. Goodbye Party for Miss Pushpa T.S. : An Analysis

Friends,
our dear sister
is departing for foreign
in two three days,
and
we are meeting today
to wish her bon voyage.

You are all knowing, friends,
what sweetness is in Miss Pushpa.
I don’t mean only external sweetness
but internal sweetness.
Miss Pushpa is smiling and smiling

even for no reason
but simply because she is feeling.
Miss Pushpa is coming
from very high family.
Her father was renowned advocate
in Bular of Surat,
I am not remembering now which place.

Surat? Ah, yes,
once only I stayed in Surat
with family members
of my uncle's very old friend,
his wife was cooking nicely..
that was long time ago.

Coming back to Miss Pushpa
She is most popular lady
with men also and ladies also.
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.
Pushpa Miss is never saying no.
Whatever I or anybody is asking
she is always saying yes,
and today she is going
to improve her prospect,
and we are wishing her bon voyage.

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

Bruce King, in his *Modern Indian Poetry in English* points out that the group of poems which Ezekiel called “very Indian poems in Indian English” are full of what appear to be parodies of language-use errors by Indians speaking English have often been misunderstood as satire of the Gujrati-influence English often used in Bombay by Indians who were educated, but not at the premier English medium schools. These speakers usually work in the various commercial establishments in and around Bombay. Their English syntax is modelled on the syntax of the vernacular, often resulting in hilarious usage errors. The use of the present continuous in place of the simple present is one of the commonest pitfalls of “doesi angrezi”. Such poems may easily raise the hackles of readers who would feel that Ezekiel, as part of the Indian Elite who can speak a better version of Queen’s English, is poking fun at them.

Interestingly, although most educated Indians since introduction of colonial rule aimed to speak and wrote the standard, approved English and more recently aim to speak standard American English, there has been little attempt by Indian poets to use local varieties of English in the way Nigerian and Caribbean writers of senior literatures mix dialect, patois, or traces of supposedly sub-standard English with the mainstream English. Only Kamala Das unceremoniously uses Malayalam—influenced English. In Indian English and vernacular fictions, characters with incomplete English are often figures of fun. This group of poems by Ezekiel, may be seen as a step towards using local speech in serious verse. He never expressed it studently, but in late verse, these in the Hymns of Parknas for example, there is a distinct tilt towards social concern as he tries to take up the practical, mundane, factual modes and mores of modern India.

In 1989, when he was invited to read his poetry to a group of student in London, he gave an account of how he began to write these “Indian English” poems. They began initially as a by-product of his work as a dramatist. A friend had told him that all the characters in his play spoke as he did. Then he began to listen to the voices of people in the streets and to record their speech in verse. So the “Indian English language” in these poems operates as a dramatic site. It is a stage peopled by a number of dramatic figures, each of whom speaks his speech, though, unlike in drama, the different characters do not interact or engage dialogically. Often, the poems are a sort

of dramatic monologue. As in the dramatic monologue format, a situation is created, a character speaks and from this speech the reader understands the situation, the characters own identity and the reactions and responses of the characters who do not speak. Read the following extract from 'The Professor'.

How many issues you have? three?
That is good. These are days of family planning
I ax not against.

'Goodbye Party for Miss Pushpa T.S'. is one of the best known poems in the group. written in the form of a farewell speech, reveals in a mood of parody and gradually reveals the character of the peaker. As in all the poems of this group, language reveals the speakers mind and social context. Cliches, trite expressions, unintended pans, are the devices used to imply hypocrisy, pretence, limited opportunities and social confusion.

The occasion is a farewell for Miss Pushpa. an office colleague, who "is departing for foreign". The rambling style typical of such speeches is tellingly employed. There is little logic is the speakers thought process and the typical Indian pretensions and hypocrisies come out clearly. The speaker does not have any precise information about Miss Pushpa and has not bothered to find out. He is uncertain when she is leaving, hence the vague "two three days", a literal translation from the vernacular. The height of hilarious nonsense is reached in the second stanza as the speaker speaks of "(not only external sweetness but internal sweetness", and reduces his poor target into practically a *moron* through his language, since Miss Pushpa "is smiling and smiling/even for no reason". Possibly Pushpa smiles because she is linguistically better equipped than the speaker and is secretly amused, or because she is compelled to be polite.

In the third stanza there is the typical Indian snobbery about family lineage. The speaker begins to talk about Pushpa's family as if he knows its members intimately. But his shakiness about where Pushpa's father used to live is a subtle pointer to his insincerity.

Stanza four is replete with absurdities. Since the speaker veers completely away from Miss Pushpa and into his own memories of a visit to

Surat, where he stayed with a family acquainted with his uncle. He remembers the cooking was good.

The poor fellow does not understand that his inept compliments take on a naughty double meaning when he praises Pushpa :“ Pushpa Miss is never saying no/whatever I or anybody is asking”. After a good deal of rambling he comes suddenly to the relevant point and informs his audience that Pushpa Miss is “going to improve her prospect /And we are wishing her bon voyage.” The poem shows, with a fine comic zest, the laxity and shallowness of own social behaviour, expressed in the way we speak and respond to situations. the poem comes to a fitting end, with the intrusion of officialese into a social occasion. Poor Miss Pushpa! not only is she constrained to smile and endure, compliments which are confusing and ambigious, sheis also requied to do the “Summing up” as at the end of an official meeting.

4.10 Questions

Essay-type :

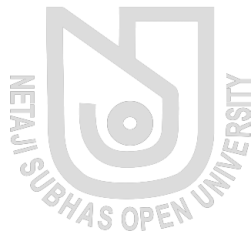
- (a) What was Buddhadeb Bose’s objection against Indians writing poetry in English? Was he justified?
- (b) How has Indian English poetry evolved from the 18th century to the present times?
- (c) what are the indications of modernism in Modern Indian poetry in English? What role did Ezekiel play in the transition to modesnism?
- (d) Trace Ezekiel’s development as a poet, with reference to the poems you have read.

Short-answer type :

- (e) Which English or American poets influenced Ezekiel?
- (f) What are P Lal’s arguments for Indian English poetry?
- (g) How does Ezekiel blend dramatic elements in his lyrics?
- (h) How does Ezekiel defict contemporary reality in his poem?

4.11 References

- (1) *Contemporary Indian Poetry* in English by P.K.J. Kurup (Atlantic Publishers)
- (2) *Modern Indian Poetry* in English edited by P. Lal
- (3) *Contemporary Indian Poetry* : (Writers Workshop) edited by Kaisen Haq (Ohio State University Press)
- (4) *Modern Indian Poetry In English* by Bruce King (O.U.P)
- (5) Nissim Ezekiel's *Collected Poems* (O.U.P)



Unit 5 Kamala Das

Structure :

- 5.1. Objectives
- 5.2 Introduction
- 5.3 Biography
- 5.4 Works
- 5.5 Her Poetry
- 5.6 Imagery
- 5.7 Post-colonial, feminist poet
- 5.8 My Grandmother's House : An Analysis
- 5.9 The Dance of the Eunuchs : An Analysis
- 5.10 The Looking Glass : An Analysis
- 5.11 Questions
- 5.12 Recommended Reading

5.1 Objectives

The objective of this unit is to explore Kamala Das's contribution to Indian English poetry and to feminist writing. It will also provide insight into Kamala Das's uniqueness as a poet.

5.2 Introduction

Kamala Das' verse ushered in a new age in Indo-Anglian poetry. Considered by all as one of modern India's foremost poets, she writes in a new voice bringing within the ambit of poetry a new domain and a new idiom. In a distinct departure from the conventional myth and folklore terrain, lyrical and romantic song, she presents hitherto uncharted territories and inchoate areas of feminine life and sexuality with honesty and candour in a voice that is often harsh and "unpoetic". With this "aggressively individualistic" poet we move into a world far removed from the world of Toru Dutt or Sarojini Naidu. As Eunice de Souza has rightly pointed out that Das has "mapped out the terrain for post-colonial women in social and linguistic terms".

5.3 Biography

Kamala Das was born into a family of poets and had her early initiation into the world of poetry through her mother, the famous Malayalam poet, Balamani Amma, and her maternal grand-uncle, Nalapat Narayan Menon, a well-known Malayalam scholar and writer. Apart from her mother, Das acknowledges the influence of the “matrilineal ethos” of the Nairs in shaping her personality and her creative career.

Born on 31st March, 1934, in Malabar, Kerala, she spent her childhood in Calcutta. Being the only girl among five siblings she did not have any formal school education but was taught by tutors and governesses at home.

When she was only fifteen years old, she was married off to her uncle, K. Madhava Das, in the Nair tradition. This marriage proved to be a turning point in her life. Bound into unimaginative and loveless domesticity, she turned to writing to express her nascent desires. Her autobiography *My Story* (1975) details her experiences within the confines of the marriage. This book has been translated into many Indian languages. From this autobiography we come to know of her complex relationship with her husband that veered between fond indulgence and extreme brutality. She felt a sense of rejection and betrayal in his close relationship with another man and this created a rift in their marital relation.

She was awarded the Chimanlal Award for fearless journalism. She also made a brief foray into the world of politics in 1984 but was defeated and voiced her disaffection with public life quite openly. In 1999 she converted to Islam and was called Kamala Surayya. As in her life, so too in her verse, she always firmly expresses her ideas fearlessly and with complete candour that has often mired her in controversies but has still not daunted her will for truth, sincerity and honesty.

5.4 Works

Her writing career began with the publication of her first short story collection in Malayalam called *Mathilukal (Walls)* in 1955. She uses the pseudonym, Madhavikutty, for her works in Malayalam, while she publishes her English writings under her own name. Her first collection of English poems *Summer in Calcutta* was published in 1965, followed by *The Descendents* (1967), *The*

Old Playhouse and Other Poems (1973), *The Anamalai Poems* (1985) and *Only the Soul Knows How to Sing* (1996). She has also published a novel and a collection of short stories in English.

5.5 Her Poetry

Kamala Das poems are essentially articulations of the self. They are born out of a need for articulating the self. The poems are autobiographical in nature and confessional in tone. "I must exude autobiography," she says. Subjects as varied as love, death, nostalgia for a happy past are treated robustly. But, overall, there is a foregrounding of love and women's sexuality in her poetry. For the first time we have an unbridled and sensuous view of the female body in her verse. She explores the many facets of women's sexuality and critiques the patriarchal acceptance of women as essentially passive and submissive. She, in effect, subverts the picture of the eternal Indian woman. "Dress in sarees, be girl, / Be wife they said."

Women's repressed lives in unfulfilled marriages are often the central idea in her poems. Das feels that being a woman means certain "collective experiences" which Indian women, subject to years of patriarchy, have always suppressed. These feelings of love, loss, yearning and sexual urges, she advocates, are normal for all women and should be brought out into the public sphere and not be locked up in a private world of misery. Das is forthright in her criticism of this patriarchal world that treats the woman as an object of lust rather than an entity.

"these men who call me
Beautiful, not seeing
Me with eyes but with hands"

5.6 Imagery

Images of Kamaia Das' verse, drawn from everyday life are common-place but her inusiveness and irony colour and make them vibrant and suggestive, Iyengar says the images of Das are "icy, stony, steely and dark". The modernist sensibility of the poet is borne out by such images as the heart that is "an empty cistern, waiting through long hours, to fill itself. Though she articulates

women's physical presence yet the body is always seen as the location of exploitation.

"The weight of my breasts and womb crushed me."

Recurrent references to "heat and dust", decay and loss are symptomatic of the general sense of enervation that afflicts modern life where love is elusive and is only translated or substituted by lust.

"... oh yes, his
mouth, and ... his limbs like pale and
Carnivorous plants
Reaching out for me, and the sad lie.
Of my unending lust."

In her world, as Iyengar points out, "the calm of fulfillment eludes forever. Love is crucified in sex, and sex defiles itself and again and again." This feeling of frustration in love is reiterated in the poetry of Das. The world is barren and life is like the "half burnt logs from funeral pyres". Loneliness, frustration, sterility are important concerns of her poetry and are expressed in vivid, often concrete and visual images. Even the rain in this world is devoid of its life-giving, nurturing, sustaining function.

"...a meager rain that smells of dust in
Attics and the urine of lizards and mice."

We have definitely moved many light years away from the lilting sound of the Palanquin Bearers.

Das' rebellion against a hostile society prompts her to articulate unbridled passion, unembarrassed and unabashed physicality. Hence her poetry is marked by extreme eroticism. Concrete images of human anatomy abound in her poetry. Her feminist leanings are clearly signified when the male body is presented as repulsive. The man is always an "old fat spider weaving webs of bewilderment" while his "mouth is a dark cavern" and his embrace is compared to a snake's. The woman is perpetually unfulfilled and her heart is a "cistern waiting to fill itself."

Das writes in a characteristic manner with language that is clear, straightforward and hard-hitting. Her language is effortless and smooth

flowing. She uses everyday language, without making an effort at choosing particular words. She says :

“Write without
A pause, don’t search for pretty words
Which dilute the truth.”

Her aim is to convey her feelings and she writes in the throes of emotion. Hence, her poems are vibrant and hard-hitting, marked by colloquialisms and conversational ease. They are intensely subjective and help in expressing the intensity of her emotions. Often the lexical choice is highly visual and has a pictorial quality as in the presentation of the “fiery Gulmohar”.

Another feature is the repetitive quality of the vocabulary she uses. Repetition helps in foregrounding and focusing. Words like “heat” and “hot” are repeated. Sometimes phrases or whole lines are repeated.

“It will be all right, it will be all right
It will be all right between the world and me.”

This incantatory repetition brings out the irony of the resolution that is being hinted at. Kamaia Das, lines often are fractured with ellipsis (...) symbolically presenting the poet’s own fractured world that left her in such despair and yearning—suggesting a chasm between aspiration and reality. A fracture, a break between desire and reality creates a deep longing in her.

The overtly erotic content of her verse has often shocked her reading public but the hard-hitting images have thrown into relief the story of “Everywoman” crushed under the weight of a male dominated society.

5.7 Post-colonial feminist poet

As a post-colonial poet Kamala Das also focussed attention on her nationality, location and her choice of language. She is confident of her nationality. “I am an Indian, very brown.” At the same time she vociferously challenges the world to question her choice of language for creative expression. “I speak three languages, write in / Two, dream in one.” She throws down the gauntlet

at her detractors.

“Don’t write in English, they said.”

With firm conviction, she validates her choice —“ The language I speak is .../ All mine, mine alone.” This is the voice of a postcolonial poet, reveling in her freedom, a consciousness that has found selfhood.

In her brief against patriarchal oppression of women and her desires, she voices feminist concerns that were the order of the day. She presents the woman’s body and explores the entire gamut of physical sensuality from the woman’s point of view. For the first time someone speaks of gifting him all her “endless female hungers.” In this way, she gives voice to hitherto suppressed and “silenced” areas of women’s experience. Traditional male, androcentric worldview has always presented women as essentially passive, without sexual desires. Kamala Das reveals the other’ picture, so far silenced in society.

“It is I who laugh, it is I who make love
And then, feel shame, it is I who lie dying
With a rattle in my throat. I am sinner,
I am saint. I am the beloved, the
Betrayed.

One can find encapsulated in these lines a resonance of her life.

5.8 ‘My Grandmother's House’ : An Analysis

There is a house now far away where once
I received love. That woman died,
The house withdrew into silence, snakes moved
Among books I was then too young
To read and, my blood turned cold like the moon
How often I think of going
There, to peer through blind eyes of windows or
Just listen to the frozen air,
Or in wild despair, pick an armful of

Darkness to bring it here to lie
Behind my bedroom's door like a brooding
Dog... you cannot believe, darling
Can you, that I lived in such a house and
Was proud, and loved... I who have lost
My way and beg now at strangers' doors to
Receive love, at least in small change?

'My Grandmother's House' was published in Kamala Das' first anthology of English poems *Summer in Calcutta* (1965). There is a wistful and nostalgic note that permeates this poem. She had spent a part of her childhood in this abode of peace, her grandmother's house. This 'house'⁵ has a special place in her poetry. This nostalgic mood resonates through other poems in this volume. *A Hot Noon in Malabar* is another expressing a deeply felt yearning for "the past, for a state of joyfulness the poet did not find in her adult life, crushed under the weight of a traditional male-dominated society.

The home is associated with love, affection and joyfulness in contrast to the vacuous present where there is no love.

In this poem she reminds her husband that once she was also the object of love and affection. In her grandmother's house she had felt secure and protected. The poem, thus, is an expression of her intense longing to be back at that home which signified nurture and sustenance, a house that supported creativity.

The house is almost made into an entity. It epitomizes innocence, happiness and all things positive, things that are associated with childhood.

In this short poem, Das reveals her desperation and frustration with her present life. There is also a wistful air in the question "that she too had lived in such a house and was proud and loved..."

The whole presentation reads almost like a fairy tale by reminding the reader that once upon a time, in the past, the poet had led a happy life but that is all gone now.

The loss of her grandmother also led to the loss of+ the protection provided by the house. Now she leads a life of abject poverty, a poverty of love and affection and begs for crumbs from strangers. The image of begging and the dog highlight the misery of her present existence.

The confessional tone is brought out in the reference to her life. In the

poem the poet addresses the spouse. The use of the word “darling” denoting affection adds an appropriate note of familiarity but it also manages to convey a tentative note to the entire relationship.. The word “least” in the last line suggests her desperation. While the theme of lovelessness in the domestic sphere is very much a part of Das’ world, the note of wistful yearning is equally characteristic.

The image of the snake is also a recurrent motif in Das’ poetry. The dilapidated house, closed windows overrun by vegetation is where the slithering snakes embrace books. The snake’s embrace is suffocating, life-threatening. The sexual overtone can hardly be ignored. In “the Stone Age” she refers to the lover’s hand as a “hooded snake”.

The evocative quality of the line “pick an armful of darkness” is extremely impressive. A sense of deep and brooding melancholy hangs over the entire visualization where there is a preponderance of darkness, death, blood that is cold, windows that do not see and air that is frozen which conveys to the reader the poet’s state of mind. Hence it is said that Das’ poetry is intensely autobiographical.

Though on the surface it seems that Das has an acute obsession with love, at a deeper level it just reveals a woman’s insecurity in a society where she is just an object rather than an agent.

5.9 ‘The Dance of the Eunuchs’ : An Analysis

It was hot, so hot, before the eunuchs came
To dance, wide skirts going round and round, cymbals
Richly clashing, and anklets jingling, jingling
Jingling... Beneath the fiery gulmohur, with
Long braids flying, dark eyes flashing, they danced and
They dance, oh, they danced till they bled... There were green
Tattoos on their cheeks, jasmines in their hair, some
Were dark and some were almost fair. Their voices
Were harsh, their songs melancholy; they sang of
Lovers dying and or children left unborn....
Some beat their drums; others beat their sorry breasts
And wailed, and writhed in vacant ecstasy. They
Were thin in limbs and dry; like half-burnt logs from

Funeral pyres, a drought and a rottenness
Were in each of them. Even the crows were so
Silent on trees, and the children wide-eyed, still;
All were watching these poor creatures' convulsions
The sky crackled then, thunder came, and lightning
And rain, a meagre rain that smelt of dust in
Attics and the urine of lizards and mice....

'Dance of the Eunuchs' was the first poem of her first anthology *Summer in Calcutta* (1965). In this startling presentation of the barren world of the eunuchs, the poet symbolically represents the frustrated and sterile world of her own life. Though the eunuchs dance with great verve and excitement, it hides a world that is both loveless and sterile.

All through the poem one sees barrenness and sterility. The dance of the eunuchs and their frenzied movements hide a sterile world. Their whirling movements lead to bleeding and not to ecstatic fulfillment. They are "thin in limbs and dry" while their voices are "harsh". The songs that they sing are "of lovers dying and of children left unborn" So everything in their world reflects aridity, hopelessness and futility. The colourful costume belies a colourless inner world. The oppressive heat adds to the general sense of futility and frustration. The thunder and lightning leads to "meager rain" and not to a downpour with healing properties. Hence, there is lack of productivity all around.

Through a series of suggestive images the poet symbolically presents the gap between the external vivacity of the lives of the eunuchs and their inner vacuity.

Through the use of various words, repeated in an incantatory manner, Das conjures up a world of frustration and sterility. The image of the dance of the eunuchs is itself ironic. They dance at festivals but have no happiness in their lives. This reveals the perception of the poet regarding her own frustrated and fractured life. Her marriage at a tender age and her experiences thereafter, had left her yearning for love and fulfillment. The words are repeated to create a hypnotic spell. The skirts are "going round and round" and the anklets are "jingling" yet the entire performance is not the gay abandon of happiness but the frenzied "convulsions" of a fractured soul in search of happiness.

The final image is also of rain sans its life giving powers but which smells of “dust in attic rooms and the urine of lizards and mice”.

The depth of the poet's misery is thus presented through this starting image of the marginalized eunuchs' performance.

5.10 'The Looking Glass' : An Analysis

Getting a man to love you is easy
Only be honest about your wants as
Woman. Stand nude before the glass with him
So that he sees himself the stronger one
And believes it so, and you so much more
Softer, younger, lovelier. Admit your
Admiration. Notice the perfection
Of his limbs, his eyes reddening under
The shower, the shy walk across the bathroom floor,
Dropping towels, and the jerky way he
Urinate. All the fond details that make
Him male and your only man. Gift him all,
Gift him what makes you woman, the scent of
Long hair, the musk of sweat between the breasts,
The warm shock of menstrual blood, and all your
Endless female hungers. Oh yes, getting
A man to love is easy, but living
Without him afterwards may have to be
Faced. A living without life when you move
Around, meeting strangers, with your eyes that
Gave up their search, with ears that hear only
His last voice calling out your name and your
Body which once under his touch had gleamed
Like burnished brass, now drab and destitute.

'The Looking Glass', published in Das' second anthology *The Descendants* (1967), is once again a criticism of the androcentric world where women are mere' playthings and objects of sexual gratification for the men. All through

her life the woman must please the man, without expecting any emotional fulfillment from him.

In an ironic tone Kamala Das highlights the role women have to play. Feminists have pointed out how the male dominated society conditions women to think in binaries where the man is strong and powerful while the woman is gentle and soft.

The most trenchant criticism of this male dominated society is revealed in the lines "Gift him all / Give him what makes you woman" and the irony lies in the list of qualities that constitutes womanhood. The list contains "the scent of / long hair, the musk of sweat between the breasts". So 'womanhood'¹ is entirely placed in the physicality of the object "woman" and does not connect to emotions or thought. Woman, thus, becomes merely a biological category robbed of any other identity.

The "looking glass" reflects the image of the man and woman. But the perspective of the woman is coloured by her gender. She must revere the "god like" perfection of the man and offer her own physical attributes as a devotee to her God.

The whole poem presents a strategy on the part of the woman to win her man in a rather witty and playful manner. But the love portrayed is not one of mutual reciprocation or of the union of the souls but rather a situation of lust assuaged

The poem stands out because of the series of startling and unconventional images. It begins with a premise that "getting a man to love you is easy". But then the premise is qualified. To get a man to love the woman, she has to be his devotee, admirer and also to present him as 'superior'. This is definitely the traditional patriarchal stereotype that Das is trying to unsettle through her ironic lines.

The tone of the poem is conversational. The informal quality is highlighted by the typical trait of using ellipses to denote the emotional quotient of the utterance. The masculine body is presented as a visual. The image of the 'walk across the bathroom floor" is a visual frame. But the woman is "scent" and "sweat" and "warmth of menstrual blood" —all tactile or olfactory images.

In this poem Das is extremely unconventional and "unpoetic". She speaks of bodily functions that had been hitherto taboo in love poetry. Herein lies her modernity.

The poem may be divided into two sections. In the first part the woman is told to offer her all in order to get her man. In the second part, a dismal picture is drawn of her life bereft of the presence of the man. The woman's body without the lustful presence of the man is compared to "brass" which is not gleaming but is dull, as life would be dull and listless for the woman in the absence of her man. Kamala Das shows great boldness in using such unconventional comparisons.

The central image of 'The Looking Glass' is used to reflect the reality of the woman's condition. Instead of a narcissistic pleasure at seeing herself reflected, the woman is more concerned at worshipping the superiority of her man, and, making sure that her image does not overshadow his.

Thus in 'The Looking Glass' once again Kamala Das reiterates her criticism of a traditional society which robs the woman of both identity and agency. Being a woman is associated with endless wanting and endless waiting in this society, and Das' acknowledged agenda remains freeing her from this stereotypical mould.

5.11 Questions

1. Assess Kamala Das's Contribution to Indian English poetry.
2. Kamala Das voices feminist concerns in her poetry. Discuss with reference to the prescribed poems.
3. Analyse Kamala Das's use of imagery in any two of her prescribed poems.
4. Comment on the poetic features of any one of the prescribed poems.
5. Are Kamala Das's poems autobiographical? Give reasons for your answer.
6. In what sense is Kamala Das a poetcolonial writer.
7. Examine the structure of 'The Looking Glass'.
8. Comment on the title The Dance of the Enochus.
9. Bring out the confessional element in The Grandmother's House.

5.12 Recommended Reading

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