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Poetry Now and Then: Trends and Tendencies in Contemporary English Poetry

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ABSTRACT: Like many other things, poetry, if it is the genuine and real thing and not an emanation in vacuo, is a living, organic product, which grows naturally out of the surroundings and bears the impress of the time and place and the circumstances wherein it happens to be conceived, and developed. Above all, it reflects, much as all literature does and will always do, the life of a people and is therefore relative and never absolute. It was D. H. Lawrence who, I believe, said something like that about Truth, and the dictum holds good even in the case of poetry as in that of all things of the spirit or all those that are the expression of man's immortal spirit.

The World War wrought many changes in many persons, places and things, and so it brought to this country a few artists, writers and poets, some good and others bad or indifferent. We shall concern ourselves only with the former and confine our discussion to a consideration of a couple of a new poets who sing today with robust, even raucous, voices and remind us all that all's not well with the world, although God's in his heaven, as Robert Browning fondly placed Him there way in the last century!

KEYWORDS: poetry, trends, tendencies, contemporary, English

I.INTRODUCTION

As Mr. E. M. Forster observed the other day when he was in Bombay, one of the significant tendencies of English literature between the two Wars, or during the "long week-end", to employ the apt phrase Mr. Robert Lindsay, is its highly subjective and therefore, psychological element, and poetry is no exception to it. Mr. Laurence Housman, the playwright, is reported to have said something to the effect (as our Vice-chancellor, Sir Bomanji Wadia, informs us) that when he happens to be reading "modern" poetry his head "swims" or something, chiefly on account of its many obscurities and private allusions which are unintelligible to the average reader of poetry, but, as Mr. Forster reminded us, much of our contemporary poetry, English or Indo-English, is not stupid or worthless but intensely intellectual and, therefore, above the level of the common man! And Mr. Forster discussed this theme at some length, which was very good indeed. The truth of the matter seems to be that the pattern of our complex contemporary experience in relation to, our civilization is so different from what we were long accustomed to, that the vehicle which has to express it has also perforce undergone an appreciable strain, thus giving an incorrect impression to those who have not paused to analyse it.[1,2,3]

Mr. Harry Milner's few poems give us the enduring impression that he has felt something of the sense of utter tragedy underlying most of our erstwhile actions and decisions and he has been sensible to the reactions which the former have produced in man generally. His expression is in essence concentrated and his vision extremely bright like the rays of the tropical sun; as in these lines:

"I cracked my soul on a logical drum
And beat my heart to a march in tune;
But the world corrects itself without me
And I tear up the earth for the grave of the moon."

He calls into question our march along the civilised way of life and even wonders whether we are not retrogressing to an era of primitive man long before the dawn of modern civilisation:

"I weep for my soul's death.
No more can I
Strain at the breath of life,
Compel my heart

To praise the life men may have won
Ten thousand thousand years from this day's sun."

The same idea also animates this stanza from a poem called 'On the Square'; the poet wonders whether, after all, man is not deceiving himself that he is now in a position to compete with God Himself because he has learnt to control lightning and rain, the sun and the ocean, the air and light:

"Is this the symptom of a new disease,
This craving for the rod?
A whacking now by fellow-men
Instead of one from God?"

Unfortunately, Mr. Milner appears to have seen only one side of life in today's Bengal, and that too through coloured spectacles, when he says in the poem, 'Bengal'—

"Green with the rush of the sap and the splash of the rain,
You are live, my Bengal!
And green are the snakes,
And green-scummed are your tanks;
And rank is the smell of the damp in your streets,
Of the palm leaves that flop from the drop of the rain,
Where the mosquitoes breed in the treacherous green
And the coolie girls sway—
Each a venomous queen—
As their flicking hands slay
The eyes' ravenous dream,
The mind's lecherous play
On the damp body's gleam."

Mr. John Gawsorth, four or five volumes of whose poems have just been issued in India, was also resident in this country for "one pacific, urban year" and, broadly speaking, the same strain runs in most of his work. There is a glaring contrast expressed between the futility of war and the treasured permanence of love, a theme that has inspired poets and artists from the beginning of Time. Take these lines from his poem by name 'Parted Lovers', for instance:

"O happy hearts
To beat as one
However severed,
However lone!
Love is to you
What love should be—
A shell containing
All the sea."

Like Mr. Milner, Mr. Gawsorth too recurs to the theme of the inevitable but futile comparison of man with God, who is destined to remain forever above everyone and everything. He declares his faith in man's state being "pitiful and puny" and indirectly sings of the superior beauties and bounties of Nature:

"I cannot conciliate the forest
Or make terms with the sea.
The mountains remain inviolate,
The storm rides my marches free,
I am but man." [4,5,6]

Through the toil and turmoil of our time, everyone of us has at one time or another longed sincerely for perfect quietude and has wished to be far from the madding crowd, far from the turbulence of man's spirit:

"The Evening Star of Bethlehem
Granted some aged men release,
The morning moon on Kairouan
Gave one war-worn youth peace."

Often the dull tedium of life in a military hospital was temporarily relieved by parties of troops entertainment. Of Mille. Angeliki Akiki, a dancer in the British military hospital at Helmhieh, he writes:

“Within her bright smile her Athens re-lives,

A vestal Eleusinian is born,

A naiad weaves through paths of Attic corn,

The one naiad that from old Greece survives

To dance, and so enliven broken lives,

To dance and comfort once-hale bodies, torn

In a holocaust that a World has worn,

Shattering hearthstones and bereaving wives.”

Here in this poet, too, we find a profound sense of disillusionment in violence and strife as a means of settling anything at all; in fact, this conviction runs through much of our recent verse:

“So it has come at last; our Victory.

This time that word we receive differently

Or has it been in vain, their sacrifice:

Drowned sailors’, encinded by the flame-thrown flare,

Pilots’, exploded in the air-tracers’ air.”

Mr. Gawsworth pays a glowing tribute to “the nightingale of India” whose lyrical strains and enchanting music have pervaded the world now for over four decades. It is simple and sincere and perhaps many of us will fancy it much:

“I have come far[7,8,9]

To find the sigil of honour

Not on the padded breast of Order and Star

But in the deeps, under the sari that rests a garden on her,

In noble and valiant depths it truly lies;

Just as it lights—a lash!—

In one fast falcon-flash

Of her vital and vigilant kind eyes.”

One perceives an inherent unity and traditional consistency of theme and content in the body of English verse written during the last quarter of the 19th century and in the four decades of the present one. The anthology entitled “50 Modern Poems by 40 Famous Poets” brings together perhaps for the first time some of the best specimens of poetry written by such writers as Quiller-Couch, Robert Lynd, Havelock Ellis, Ernest Rhys, Douglas Hyde, first President of the Eire, Arthur Symons, Harold Monro, Gerald Gould, E. H. W. Meyerstein, Gerald Bullet and Ruth Pitter. It serves to show once again that, whatever the age in which men live, their intimate reactions to essentials are more or less similar, differing only in point of externals according to the fashions of the time.

On the whole, the future of present-day English poetry, as that of our Indo-English poetry, is extremely bright and promising, and this contribution to the literature of our time is sure to be reckoned as distinctive and important as that of the Victorians was held to be to that far-off epoch made luminous by the passage of time—the Great Victorian Age.

II.DISCUSSION

Modern poetry has given a rich harvest of poetic thought in the style and diction in a peculiar manner. The apprehension of the critics on modern poetry were baseless. In modern age there “has been no dearth of great poets or great poems that will stand the test of time and become a part of the imperishable literacy heritage of England.”

In Modern Age, Poetry can be written on almost any topic. The modern poet is inspired by trains, tramcars, telephone, the snake charmer and things of commonplace interest. Modern poets do not belong to a single recognisable group. “Mr. Bridges is the poet of nine O’clock in the morning, Mr. Hardy of midnight. The truth is there has never been a greater. The variety of moods among poets than during the past two generations”. Following are the main tendencies of 20th Century poetry.

(1) Realism in the Twentieth Century Poetry

The poetry of the Twentieth century is characterised by a note of realism. The modern poet portrays life and paints it as it is with all its wants and ugliness. Romantics of the preceding century were not giving the sordid realities of life. Hence their poetic vision becomes unrealistic. Robert Frost in *The Gum Gatherer*, Edmund Blunden in *The Poor Man's Pig*, W.W. Gibson in *The Stone* and John Masefield in *Cargoes*, Rupert Brooke in *The Great Lover* strike the note of realism. Robert Frost, Edmund Blunden, W.W Gibson, John Masefield are the poets of realism in modern poetry. The best expression of realism in modern poetry is to be found among the war poets, Owen, Graves, Sassoon, who have described vividly and realistically the horrors of war in a language that sometimes shocks poetic sensibility. Sassoon in the poem *Counter Attack* "set out to present in brutal verse the realities of war without gloss or evasion." [10,11,12]

(2) Democratic and Humanitarian Note in the 20th Century Poetry

Modern poetry is characterized by a note of humanitarian and democratic sentiments and feelings. The modern poets meditate over the daily struggles of the people, the same potentialities of a spiritual conflict that the older poets found in those of exalted rank. *Consecration* by Masefield is a representative poem bringing out the modern poet's concern with the life of the common people— The poet says:

Others may sing of the wine and the wealth and the mirth,
The portly presence of potentates goodly in girth,
Mine be the dirt and the dross, the dust and scum of the earth.

The common man and his sufferings is of main interest to Masefield, Gibson and Galsworthy. Their miserable lot, grim annals and dark horrors have been expressed in their poetry.

The modern poet is not only interested in the lives of the poor people. But is equally inspired to treat sympathetically the lot of the animals. *Stupidity Street* of Galsworthy pleads far greater sympathy for birds, Hodgson invokes sympathy for tames, and shabby tigers and dancing dogs and bears in *The Bells of Heaven*.

(3) Note of Pessimism in Modern Poetry

The pettiness, suffering and tragedy of human life was deeply felt by modern poets. So while writing about the downtrodden people a gloominess is always present in his poetry. So a pessimistic note prevailed the poetry of the modern poets. *Houseman* Hardy, Huxley, T. S. Eliot are the poets of pessimism and disillusionment in modern poetry. These poets are dissatisfied with God and the naked dance of chance and materialism in the modern world, and their poetry is the target of modern society in a pessimistic strain: The following lines by T. S. Eliot give a deep note on pessimism:

What are the roots that clutch,
What branches grow
Out of this stony rubbish? Son of man,
You cannot say, or guess, for you know only,
A heap of broken images, where the sun beats
And the dead tree gives no shelter, the cricket no relief.

(4) The Spirit of Romanticism in Modern Poetry

The works of Walter De La Mare, James Elroy Flecker, W.B. Yeats, John Masefield and Edward Thomas prove the fact that the spirit of romance is as old as life itself. In spite of the note of crude reality in the modern poetry a tone of romanticism prevailed the works of these poets. The true romantic spirit bordered with supernaturalism is saturated in the poetry of Walter De La Mare. With this poet the old world of ghosts and fairies have come into their own in the 20th century. The dim moon light of romance and chivalry hovers over the early poems of Gibson. A note of true romanticism is heard in the following lines —

I sang of Lovers and she praised my song,
The while the king looked on her with cold eyes.

(5) Complexity and Psychology in Modern Poetry

Psychological complexity and difficult imagery make the modern poem quite difficult. The complexity in modern poetry has been accentuated by the New Metaphysicals like T.S. Eliot, W.H. Auden, Stephen Spender, Cecil Day Lewis and Louis Mac Neice. These new metaphysicals “were often as crabbed and tortuous in expression as he least luminous of their long-ago predecessors such as Donne.” Some of the poems written by T.S. Eliot and Ezra Pound are very difficult to understand because of their psychological complexity and difficult imagery. G.S. Fraser says in *The Modern Writer and His World*: “We feel that much modern poetry is very difficult and that it does not always repay the labor involved in working it out. In the last hundred years, complexity has been more and more heavily borne in all of us, and a false or affected simplicity is a detestable thing”. [13,14,15]

(6) Love in Modern Poetry

Love forms the subject of many modern lyrics. Robert Bridges has produced fine sonnets of love in *The Growth of Love*. His poems *Awake My Heart to be Loved*, *Awake*, *Awake* and *I will not let thee go* are fine lyrics of love. W.B. Yeats’s *When you are old* is a fine poem of love. Arthur Symon’s *The Broken Tryst* deals with disappointment in love. The lover feels despair because the ‘tryst’ is broken.

And then a woman passed. The hour Rang heavily along the air
I had no hope, I had no power
To think—for thought was but despair

John Masefield finds a feeling of dejection in love. The beauty of the beloved reminds him at once of the decay of physical charms. His mind never seems to forget that:

Death has a lodge in lips as red as cherry
Death has a mansion in the Yew-tree berries.

(7) Religion and Mysticism in Modern Poetry

A note of Religion and Mysticism is present in Modern poetry. Though the modern age is the age of science but there are so many poems written on the subjects of religion and mysticism. Francis Thompson, Robert Graves, G.K. Chesterton, Belloc, Charlotte Mew, W.B. Yeats, George, Russel are the great poets who have kept alive the flame of religion and mysticism in their poetry. Thompson’s *Hounds of Heaven* and *In Strange Land* are great poems of religion in modern poetry. Robert Graves *In the Wilderness*, Mrs. Meynell in *I Am the Way* presents the omnipotence and omniscience of God. Chesterton in the *Ballad of White House*, *The House of Christmas* evokes the feelings of religion. Noyes was a Christian by faith, and in joyous verse he sang, *The Lord of Life is risen again; and Love is Love of All*”.

(8) Longingness in Modern Poetry

Modern poets express longingness of all kinds in their poetry. It is quite obvious that longingness is at the root of all poetry whether ancient or modern. Rupert Brooke’s *Old Vicarage, Grantham* is not merely a wail, it is also a cry of homesickness. John Masefield’s *Seekers* is the best Example of the longing of man for God and the eternal city of light. [16,17,18]

Friends and loves we have none, nor wealth nor blessed abode
But the hope of the city of God at the other end of the road.
Not for us are content and quiet, and peace of mind
For we go seeking a city that we shall never find.

(9) Nature in Modern Poetry

Modern poet is elated and exalted at the sight of nature’s loveliness. He does not find any spiritual meaning in Nature, he is not a mystic. He gives an exquisite picture of birds, clouds, landscapes, countryside and the sea in his poetry. The name of the poets like Masefield, Robert Bridges, Edmund Spenser can be mentioned as the great poets

of Nature in modern poetry. The beauty of nature and the creatures those belong to it are appreciated and depicted in their poems.

(10) Diction and Style in Modern Poetry

There is a touch of simplicity and directness in the modern poetry. The words and usage selected for the poetry are not old or archaic; rather they are expressive. The old or archaic words and usages are no longer in vogue. Words are chosen for their association and only those words are employed which convey the meaning.

In the use of meter also modern poets have chosen to be free. They have followed Vers Libre i.e. freedom from trammels of verse. Their experiments in verification induced them to replace Verse rhythm by sense rhythm. So, in modern poetry there is free verse movement.

Modern poetry has also been influenced by the techniques of music, sculpture, painting and other fine arts. The modern poet freely uses the vocabulary and techniques of the other arts. The Sitwells, for example care more for the sound than the meaning of their words. The variations and repetitions in T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* are like the movements of a symphony so much so that I.A. Richards calls his poetry, "the music of ideas". Like a musician's phrases, his ideas are arranged, not that they may tell us something, but that their effects on us may combine into a coherent whole of feeling and attitude.[19,20,21]

Impressionism, Imagism and Surrealism, are some other innovations of twentieth century poetry. The imprisonments seek to convey the vague, fleeting sensations passing through their minds by the use of a novel imagery and metaphor. The imagists, headed by Ezra Pound, aim at clarity of expression through the use of hard, accurate and definite images to convey their intellectual and emotional complexes. The surrealists try to express whatever passes in the subconscious, or even the unconscious, without any control or reflection by the conscious. These innovations have influenced the art of Eliot in various ways. All this increases the complexity of modern poetry, and the confusion of the reader.

(11) The Romantic Impact on Symbolism

Although the twentieth century poetry is satirical, yet there was a vein of romanticism in modern poetry. Pre-Raphaelite movement is highly romantic which is in the last decade of the nineteenth century The decadence of the nineties has influenced the modern poets. Hence Masfield and Yeats have the romantic longing for a more perfect world. They wish to seek refuge into a fairy land. Love, the key-note of romantic poetry of the nineteenth century has not been completely wiped out. Robert Bridges' love lyrics are unforgettable; W.B. Yeats has been considered the distinguished love poet of the twentieth century. In the French literature, this note of romance is deeply saturated.

The French symbolists namely Laforgue, Verlaine, Mallarme are highly romantic. Under the influence of French symbolists, poets like Yeats and Eliot, make extensive use of symbolism to communicate their visions and sensations often too complex and intricate to be conveyed in any other way. Auden's landscapes, persons and places are symbolic. Such use of symbolism often results in ambiguity and obscurity

(12) Impact of 17th Century Metaphysical Poetry

There had been a revival of dance school of metaphysical poetry. Grierson's anthology of dance poem was published in 1912 which was immensely read by the modern poets. Thus English poetry has displayed more and more the intellectual traits of Donne's poetry. Among the modern poets, T. S. Eliot has brought about this metaphysical revival. Much of Auden's imagery reminds us of the metaphysical poets. Hence in the modern poetry we find the same use of startling, far-fetched imagery, the same bringing together of opposites, the same urge to startle and surprise. The metaphysical style immediately draws the attention of the reader.

(13) Revival of Mysticism and Religious Faith

The twentieth century is the age of science and rationalism. The people are skeptical about God. For example, Hardy Mocks at heavenly forces sarcastically and ironically. Housman calls the Almighty father a “brute or a blackguard.”

But still, the religion has far-reaching influence on the new poetry. Most of the poems of T.S. Eliot and Francis Thompson are a revival of Christian mysticism. Masfield, the well-known modern poet has expressed his heavenly views in his poem, The Everlasting Mercy.[21,22,23]

His devotional lyrics are highly commendable. Hence most of the modern poets adopted the traditions of Blake and Wordsworth in respect of religion and mysticism in their works. D. H. Lawrence’s poetry is admired because of his mystical attitude. Auden became an orthodox Christian by 1940; WB. Yeats is a mystic visionary in whose poetry the gods and fairies of Celtic mythology are a dominating feature.

(14) Development of Poetry in the Thirties

The poets of the thirties had profound admiration to earlier writers who earned great reputations in the established modern poetry. But they i.e. Auden, Empson, John Betjeman, Dylan Thoman, Anne Ridler, George Barker had confusion on the new trends and ideas. They had no vivid and clear vision in their poems. Hence the people of the period were not visualizing any specific school of poetry. Most of the poets were lamenting the age. They were not giving the specific idea of the society.

(15) Age of Reviews and Anthology: Their Significant Role

The literary climate of the thirties was largely established by the flurry of magazines and anthologies which not only presented new poems, stories and plays but which encouraged personal attacks and retorts in an atmosphere of literary guerrilla warfare. Michael Roberts was responsible for New Signature (1932), the fiercely propagandist collection New country (1933) and The Faleer Book of Modern Verse (1936). Other avant garde journals were Contemporary poetry and prose, with their insistent political stress. Julian Symon’s Twentieth Century Verse, and perhaps the most influential, New Verse edited by Geoffrey Grigson, rather different in tone was F.R. Leavis’s Scrutiny which praised and castigated writers with dry, donnish phrases. Although New Verse’s favorite target was Edith Sitwell, who was pictured as aristocratic, eccentric and conceited, it also kept a close watch on its favored sons. Auden was criticized for accepting the Pommel, Eliot and Herbert Read for sympathy with social Credit theories, and C. Day Lewis for acting as selector for the Book Society. Grigson’s pungent comments on this black sliding by one of the most vocal anti-bourgeois give us a glimpse of the intensity of the literary-political life of the times: The book society is a Limited Company pimping to the mass bourgeois mind and employing distinguished members of the literary underworld, adopters of literature as a profession.

(16) The Difficulty of Modern Poetry

Such an emphasis on the evolution of new forms had obvious dangers, chief among them a lack of proportion which elevated from above substance, and a glorification of eccentricity for its own sake. The freedom of vers libre encouraged license, and the pursuit of novelty increased the obscurity which came from the attempt to communicate complex states of mind. Much of the poetry of the period is admittedly difficult, and poetry was in danger of becoming an art for the initiated few. This trend was emphasized by the popularity of the metaphysical conceit, which accompanied the rebirth of interest in Donne and his fellows, the growing use of symbolism under the influence of Yeats and the French symbolists, and the imitation of the allusiveness of the early Eliot. On the question of difficulty, Eliot himself wrote:

“We can only say that it appears likely that poets in our civilization, as it exists at present, must be difficult. Our civilization comprehends great variety and complexity, and this variety and complexity, playing upon a refined sensibility must produce various and complex results. The poet must become more and more comprehensive, more allusive, more indirect, in order to force, to dislocate if necessary, language into his meaning.”

Poetry is a criticism of life. It must maintain its contact with life. Modern poetry is the reflection of modern life.

It is realistic in tone and expresses the spirit of the age. It cannot be denounced as petty, wayward and puerile. It can safely take its place of pride in the kingdom of poetry produced from the times of changes to the modern times.

The poets of today are sincere in their vocation. There is the stamp of honesty in modern poetry. "The poetry of the twentieth century is less vague, less verbose, less eloquent than most poetry of the Victorian period. It has set before itself an ideal of absolute simplicity and sincerity—an ideal which implies an individual, and unsteretyped diction and an individual and unsteretyped rhythms".

III.RESULTS

Much that is traditional and Victorian still persists in modern poetry. Twentieth century poetry is a curious mixture of the traditional and the experimental. It is a curious mixture of the old and the new. It is complex and many-sided. Complexity, abundance of output, revolt against tradition, love of nature, pity for the poor and the suffering, disillusionment, loss of faith in religion, the metaphysical note, the romantic strain, the influence of music and other fine arts and new techniques are main trends of modern poetry. In the poetry of Thomas Stearns Eliot, we see several of these trends. In a sense, he has broken completely the bridge between romanticism and modernism. Moreover, he has influenced Modern poetry to a great extent and main trends of modern poetry.

The Modern poetry is a poetry of revolt. It results largely from the impact of science. The poet turns away from the older romantic tradition. The tradition still persists in Georgian poetry of the early years of the new century. The revolt is best exemplified in the poetry of T.S. Eliot. The poet sees life in its naked realism. Even the most prosaic and commonplace subjects are considered suitable. The heavy thud of bus, creaking of tramcars, the rattling noise of railway trains, the drone of an aeroplane, all these find their echo in modern poetry. The squalor and dinginess of an industrial civilization are reflected everywhere in the works of T.S. Eliot. After the great war, poems appear in an ever increasing number on the destructive means of warfare. The imagery and vocabulary of the modern poet reflects the influence of science and scientific inventions. Realism in subject matter has led the modern poet to reject the highly, ornate and artificial poetic style of the romantics in favour of a language which resembles closely the language of everyday life.[24,25,26]

The new poetry is realistic. The poet's consciousness of the grim realities of life has shattered all illusions and romantic dreams. The tragedy of everyday life has induced in the poet a mood of disillusionment. So the poetry today is bitter and pessimistic. The pessimism of the modern poet is very poignant and heart-rending. It is even sharper than the pessimism of Hardy. Because it arises out of the contemplation of the stark realities of life. There is nothing sentimental about it. The Great War was a nerve-shattering experience. Man lost faith in accepted values. As a consequence, this note of bitterness is even more pronounced after the war. The Waste Land of Eliot reflects the tragic gloom and despair of the post-war world.

As a result of science and the spirit of rationalism, the poet is sceptical about God. Hardy laughs ironically at Him. Housman does not hesitate to call Him a brute or a black-guard. But this does not mean that religion is no longer a source of inspiration in poetry. In T.S. Eliot and Francis Thompson, we find a revival of Christian mysticism. "The Everlasting Mercy" of Masefield has a religious theme. There are many fine devotional lyrics scattered all over his work. Even today there are mystical poets in the tradition of Blake and Wordsworth. Besides, the influence of science, religion and mysticism many other influences are at work on the modern poet. There has been a revival of interest in the poetry of Donne and the other metaphysical poets of the 17th century. Grierson's edition of Donne's poems was published in 1912. Ever since English poetry has reflected more and more the intellectual qualities of Donne's poetry. Eliot has done much to bring about this metaphysical revival. Thus we find in his poetry the same use of startling, farfetched imagery, the same bringing together of opposites, the desire to startle and surprise. In this way, he is able to capture attention.

Despite its stark realism in theme and treatment, there also runs a vein of romanticism in modern poetry. Much of Georgian and Edwardian poetry is in the romantic strain. We find this strain of romance in the poetry of Walter De La Mare, John Masefield and Yeats. In spite of all their earthliness, they have the romantic longing for a more perfect world. They would like to escape into a fairyland. Love is the dominant theme of the romantics. It has not

altogether died out in their poetry. Robert Bridges has left behind him some fine love lyrics. W.B. Yeats has been called the greatest love-poet of the 20th century.

Modern poetry has been influenced by the techniques of music, sculpture, painting and other arts. The modern poet freely uses the vocabulary and techniques of the other arts. However, it is music which has exercised the profoundest influence. The variations and repetitions in T.S. Eliot's "The Waste Land" are like the movements of a symphony. As a result, L.A. Richards calls his poetry the music of ideas. Like a musician's phrases, his ideas are arranged. The technique of the cinematograph is also exploited by the poet of "The Waste Land".

The modern poet is constantly experimenting with new verse-forms and poetic techniques. The use of slang and colloquialism has become common. The language and rhythm of poetry approximate more and more to those of common speech. The bonds of metre have been loosened. Rules of rhyme or metre are not followed. Stresses vary according to emotion. Verse-rhythm is replaced by sense-rhythm. The influence of modern psychologists, Freud, Jung and Bergson has become a commonplace. Emphasis has shifted from the externals to the rendering of the soul or Psyche.

However, impressionism, imagism and surrealism are some other innovations in the 20th century. The impressionists seek to convey the vague and fleeting sensations passing through their minds by the use of a novel imagery and metaphor. The imagists are headed by Ezra Pound. They aim at clarity of expression through the use of hard, accurate and definite images to convey their ideas and emotions. The sur-realists try to express whatever passes in the subconscious, without any control or selection by the conscious. These innovations increase the complexity of modern poetry, and the bafflement of the reader. T.S. Eliot becomes an idol and the chief exponent of modernism in his poetry. He and Modern poetry go hand in hand. His influence in this respect is undeniable. [27,28,29]

IV. CONCLUSION

So far as poetical creation is concerned, the present is a period of transition, that is to say, there are many widely separate attempts, some fine and powerful beginnings but no large consummation, no representative work, no dominating figure. But it is a period full of hundreds of influences, many-motived, and therefore naturally rich in interesting and fruitful experiments. So far as the output of the modern poetry is concerned the new age is not yet. It is with Sāvitrī that the new age may be said to have arrived.

Among the precursors of this new age may be counted Whitman, Carpenter, Yeats, A. E. Meredith, Stephen Phillips, Tagore in whose works one can see clear indications of the new spirit and experiments with many forms of poetic expression. The nature of this change may be said to consist in the deepening and enlarging of the thought-mind of man, a more profound and intimate way of seeing life, of feeling and interpreting Nature. A greater "inwardness" seems to be the drive of the creative spirit. A greater subjectivity I than has yet found expression in poetry is becoming dominant. The subjectivity of the nineteenth century was an individual subjectivity but what seems to be coming after the appearance of Whitman is a I universal subjectivity, that is to say, we see the rise of creators in the field of poetry who, as individuals seem to be striving to live in the universal soul and the universal mind. This tendency naturally means a move towards a greater thought-element as material for poetry. Among the precursors of the new age, various tendencies have been trying to find expression, but behind them all, one sees the general element consisting of the acceptance of the greatness of man as an individual and as a community, of his life, of Nature, of the unity of mankind rising upto the divinity of man in rare moments of inspired sight. When we say "thought-element" we mean to imply that the creator will observe life and the whole field of his experience from the region of his clear intellect; he will be above the vital and the emotional mind which reacts more powerfully and immediately to life. The creation that comes out from the reactions of the life-spirit alone can give us the feeling of the power of the vital thoughts, force of passion and emotion, and all the multicoloured play of the life-spirit in its intensity and grandeur. But this dear intellect as the creator gives us the feeling of a greater spirit which embraces life and is capable of showing what is behind life and what is more than life. [30]

When we say that the thought or the intelligence would be the creator we do not mean that it will be devoid of force of life or vigour and it would be something remote and lifeless. It will be thought-element suffused with enthusiasm,

giving a greater breath of life to poetical creation. A growing sense of a greater spirit in man and in Nature is one of the most fundamental tendencies of the coming age. It is that which breaks forth in one of those inspired outbursts of Whitman wherein "he casts forward the ideal heart of this wider movement into the sense of the divine unity which is its completion": (Future Poetry)

"O Thou transcendent,
Nameless, the fibre and the breath,
Light of the light, shedding forth universes, thou centre
of them, Thou mightier centre of the true, the good, the loving,
How should I think, how breathe a single breath, how
speak, if out of myself,
I could not launch to those superior universes?
Swiftly I shrivel at the thought of God,
At Nature and its wonders. Time and Space and Death,
But that I, turning, call to thee, O soul, O actual Me,
And lo, thou gently masterest the orbs,
Thou matest Time, smilest content at Death,
And fillest, swellest full the vastnesses of Space.
Greater than stars or suns,
Bounding, O soul, thou journeyest forth;
What love than thine and ours could wider amplify?
What aspirations, wishes, outvie thine and ours, O soul?
What dreams of the ideal? what plans of purity,
perfection, strength?
What cheerful willingness for others' sake to give up all?
For others' sake to suffer all?
. Reckoning ahead, O soul, when thou, the time
achieved,...—
Surrounded, copest, frontest God, yieldest, the aim
attained,
As filled with friendship, love complete, the Elder
Brother found,
The Younger melts in fondness in his arms".
—Leaves of Grass.
Sri Aurobindo, The Future Poetry: Recent English Poetry - IV

In addition to the work of innovator of the new world here is an example from A. E. the Irish poet, inheritor of the old Irish culture:

"Dusk wraps the village in its dim caress;
Each chimney's vapour, like a thin grey rod,
Mounting aloft through miles of quietness,
Pillars the skies of God".
—A. E. George Russel.

This strain is present in more or less degree in all the writers whom we have named as precursors.

The old forms of poetic speech cannot contain entirely the new spirit and they must either enlarge and deepen themselves or under-go a transformation. In the actual process of poetical creation the originating inspiration comes from above the intellect. It might come through the intuitive soul or the soul of vision. Even when a truth either of mind or of life, of philosophy or religion, or science even, has to be expressed in poetry the creator has not merely to offer "a precise and a harmonious or forcefully presented idea" to the mind. He has, in fact, to suffuse it with life-force and therefore he would naturally turn to a more intimate and directly intuitive speech which comes from the deeper Soul. It is not mind that is the creator of the highest poetry. It is imaginative intellect that is the general basis of poetic creation, but at its highest, creation comes out of inspiration from above the intellect. But very seldom the whole body of poetry is received direct from the original higher source. The mind, the brain, the critical intellect and many other faculties generally mix up with the Over-head inspiration and mar the purity of the original form. It is

when the Intuitive Soul can receive both the soul and the body, the spirit and the word, without admixture in the transmission that we get "immortal tones of speech" and the highest creation. That is to say, the poetic creation has to rise from the imaginative intellect to the intuitive spirit, and even above it to what Sri Aurobindo calls, "the seeing mind" where the expression becomes illuminative speech, and if the poet can rise still higher, to the very home of creative force, he would there find that his creation rises to "the inevitable, absolute and revealing word". "The greatest poets have been those in whom these movements of a highest intensity of intuitive and inspired speech have been of frequent occurrence".—Sri Aurobindo.

It has been argued since Whitman that metre and rhyme are played out and have no future. It is even said that as modern life is large and many-sided and constantly changing, poetry to be sincere must also follow this movement of life and therefore should have no rigid bondage to metres or rhymes. It may be granted in justification of the impulse behind the modernist spirit that poetic form today needs a medium which can allow of a vast flowing movement of the spirit giving it liberty to express sudden turns and alterations indispensable in a complex context of life today. But it must also be borne in mind that art does not always follow life in its imperfect forms or in its chaotic movements. It always tries to impose a more perfect form upon its creation and it is this severe self-discipline which gives beauty and nobility to poetical expression. This self-restraint and obedience to a greater law of inner harmony gives to poetry its ideal perfection, and Sri Aurobindo is right when he gives a note of warning that whoever "in the name of freedom relaxes this effort" permits "a laxity and a dangerous downward movement".[31]

The modernist movement can be said to begin with the frank denunciation of metre as a hindrance by Walt Whitman who regards it at best as a petty ornament. After him, poetry dominated by thought-element came in vogue. And now today, in the words of W. B. Yeats, "younger men are in revolt against irrelevant description of Nature, scientific moral discursiveness, political eloquence" and what they call "psychological curiosity". Many poets are trying something like poetic journalism and want to make it even striking; they are, that is to say, trying to be 'reporters'. Taking a survey of the present-day field of poetry one finds that though England has more poets than at any other time, except perhaps in seventeenth century, but there is no dominating figure. Yeats finds the whole field of modernist poetry made up of "soulless self-reflection of man's skill". It seems to be the result of "great boredom" and is trying "to force language against its will into powerful artificial vividness". In trying to arrive at "essential form" modernist poets resort to dry intellectual analysis which reduces the form to its bare vulgarity devoid of all force and beauty of life. It reduces man's life to that which is most persistent in him—"the bone"! Yeats says: "the symbol itself is contradictory, it is the horror of life—horror of Death!"

Apart from Yeats there are other modern critics who are quite critical of the modernist spirit in poetry. Here is what F. L. Lucas says, "Today, the high way of poetry is being blocked by laboriously eccentric gentlemen begging the public to stop and overhear them". He pleads for "the echo of a great soul" in poetry.

Alien Brokington, in his book, "Poetry and Mysticism" says, "The modernist poet hardly has any reserved areas though he is trying to create some with barbed wire of psychological jargon, or economic doctrine. Life is being psycho-analysed in verse, and consciousness tortured to yield new materials. Modernist poetry proves, however, that as yet no safe anchorage has been found and both the struggle for new forms of expression and the character of literary materials assembled show that the effort to introduce novel associations and links which lie below consciousness have yet to find its justification"... "In short, something more than a pursuit of process is called for". He says about Auden, "Mr. Auden's poems often demand from the reader the ingenuity of a cross-word puzzle expert used to ready handling of reference books, notes and current controversies". And he continues, "free verse has, indeed, come to stay within strict limits. But, it remains, and can never replace blank verse, rhymed lyric, or sonnet, today mainly as an evidence of the daring explorations of the modern craftsman rather than of major creative achievements".

Sri Aurobindo says about modernist poetry, "It is an error to regard metre as an artificial element. It is a natural form for certain states of creative emotion and vision". Further he says, "modern poetry lacks only two things: the inspired phrase and inevitable word, and the rhythm that keeps a poem for ever alive. It is not the irregular verses or rhymes that matter, one can make perfection out of irregularity. They write poetry from the cultured striving mind, not from the elemental soul-power". To Sri Aurobindo, "much of it seems to be mere flat objectivity, or, what is worse, an exaggerated—emphatic objectivity; emotion seems often to be replaced by intensive vital-physical sensation of the object.... Not only that there are no boundaries left in some arts—like poetry of ultra-modern school—but no foundation or no art either.... Obscurity and unintelligibility are not the essence of any poetry and cannot be its aim and principle".

While trying to estimate and understand the aim of modernist poetry he says, "the turn there is to suppress emotion, rhetoric, colouring, sentiment and arrive at something very direct, expressive recording either the thing exactly as it is or some intimate essential truth of the thing without wrapping it up in ideas and sentiments, superfluous images and epithets". He tries to find a psychological justification for the modernist and envisages even a possibility of advance. Says he, "all the same, there is behind, but not still successfully achieved, the possibility of a real advance, an attempt to get away from ornate mental constructions about things to the expression of the intimate truth of the things themselves as directly seen by a deeper sight within us. Only it seems to me a mistake to theorise that only by this kind of technique and in this particular way what is aimed at be done". Analysing further the largest trends in English poetry, he says, "the latest craze in England is either for intellectual quintessence or sensations of life, while any emotional or ideal element in poetry is considered as a deadly sin. But beautiful poetry remains beautiful even if it is not in the current style. And, after all, Yeats and A. E. are still there in spite of this new fashion of the last one or two decades".

Under the stress of modern psychological conditions brought about especially by the two world wars and the upsetting of the outer conditions of life, the modernist poet has found it very difficult to find the true centre of his inspiration. As a result we find the field of poetry full of many theories. While conceding that remarkable experiments have been made under some of them, it must be confessed that barring some creation of high merit the over-all picture of the modernist creation of poetry does not appear to be a successful performance nor does it seem to convey the impression of a lasting creation. Some of the theories are that poetry, mainly, should be the "expression of thought", that poetry should be the "expression of the personality of the poet"; while equally emphatic is the opposite theory that poetry is an "escape from personality". There are some who hold that poetry must deal with the "flux of life" and there are others who maintain that expression of "essential form" is the main business of poetry. There may be other theories with their votaries. We shall not discuss these theories in detail because the highest poetry is hardly written in strict conformity with any theory. But we can observe that all these theories tend to stress the subjective aspect of expression in poetry. In other words, the poet wants to convey his own thought-structure of life or cosmos, he wants to convey some special side of his nature or individuality, he wants to interpret to us the flux which he sees or notices around him, he wants to convey his subjective perception of the essential form. At times, he wants to convey even what he calls direct sensation of the object without any ornamentation, image or colour. In this attempt he very often becomes unintelligible, obscure, artificial and prosaic.

With the foregoing enumeration of the faults, shortcomings and imperfections of the modernist poet, let us try to see the deeper springs of his efforts and experiments and see if they are justified. In this connection, Sri Aurobindo's appraisal of the modern times gives us a profound view and psychological justification for these modernist attempts in poetry. In his book, "The Future Poetry", he says, "Everywhere there is a seeking after some new thing, a discontent with the moulds, ideas and powers of the past, a spirit of innovation, a desire to get at deeper powers of language, rhythm, form, because a subtler and vaster life is in birth. There are deeper and more significant things to be said than have yet been spoken and poetry, the highest essence of speech, must find a fitting voice for them".

While analysing the causes for such a seeking and such a discontent he probes deeper and says, "the human intelligence seems on the verge of an attempt to rise through the intellectual into an intuitive mentality". He already sees the signs of such a change not only in the modernist efforts but in the deeper and higher psychological and spiritual strains visible in the field of poetic expression. He observes, "a glint of this change is already visible and in poetry there is already the commencement of such a greater leading; the conscious efforts of Whitman, the tone of Carpenter, the significance of the poetry of A. E., the rapid, immediate fame of Tagore are its first signs. The idea of the poet who is also Rishi has made again its appearance". (P.P.) This new poetic departure will not necessarily be the old, ordinary, outer vital emotional and mental life of man but will contain, even when it deals with these fields, the deeper and the higher strains from the regions of the intuitive, the inspirational, the revelatory and the spiritual consciousness. The modernist is attracted by the subliminal, the subconscious and the abnormal of the vital and the lower vital regions of human consciousness by a kind of false subjectivism. But the real fulfilment of his efforts; the highest strains of his expression would be attained when he would contact, either deliberately or by accident, the higher levels of human consciousness which, though for him not constant and permanent at present, are still available and attainable and, in a way, are inevitable in the course of his upward evolution. That would be the true subjectivism enlarging him beyond the limits of the intellect, and opening him to higher levels of consciousness. Sri Aurobindo refers to this possibility in his following observation: "The poetry of Whitman and his successors has been that of Life but of Life, broadened, illumined, raised by the strong intellectual intuition of the self of man and i the large soul of humanity. At the subtlest elevation of all that has yet been reached stands, or rather, wings and

floats in a high intermediate region, the poetry of Tagore not in the complete spiritual but amid an air that with its seekings and glimpses found in a psycho-spiritual haven of subtle and delicate soul experience transmuting the earth-forms by the touch of the Radiance". It is Sāvitrī that lifts us into the very body of that Radiance.

We have already spoken of the nature of the psychological tendencies that are at work behind the efforts and experiments of the modernist poets. As the lyrical form permits a rhythmic intensity of expression and as in the modern age the impulse is more lyrical than anything else, we should expect the new tendencies to find expression in the lyric. The lyric also permits an infinite variety of soul-experience within its mould. It allows also a great freedom and variety in its motives and cadences. It has even the capacity to rise to the height of an epic. Sri Aurobindo has himself made very striking and successful innovations in the lyrical form and has given us lyrics that set altogether a new pattern with regard to both the content and the form; but as we are here primarily concerned with Sāvitrī the epic, we shall not take up the study of his lyrics here. We shall try to survey the field of modernist poetry and see if we can discover in it the new inward turn of expression, a more subjective attitude and a new way of sounding the possibilities of the language. There are many among the modern writers who under the stress of life have given evidence of a capacity to rise to intuitive perception or inspired expression or psychic insight in their creation. There is the perception of the universal subjectivity on their part and it gives a new vision of nature—of the land and the sea and the earth and its objects—a new way of looking at human relations, a vision of the collectivity or of humanity—carrying altogether a new throb, and there is above all, in most of them, a perception of the supra-rational and a tendency to concretise, to objectivise, so to say, inner, states or spiritual experiences. Among these poets may be counted C.Day Lewis, George Barker, Stephen Spender, W. H. Auden, Peter Yeats, Walter Alien, Edith Sitwell, David Gascoyne, J.A.Chadwick alias Arjava, K.D.Sethna, Sigfried Sasson, Herbert Read, to give only a few names out of the many.

Of these writers. Day Lewis stands out as a very remarkable poet embodying these inmost tendencies in the highest degree in his work. His 'Magnetic Mountain' and some other works which I had occasion to see in anthology have given me a very great thrill of delight to see in them a surprisingly ample element of conscious intuitive insight and expression. Some of his poems, notably, "The Poet", "Word Over-all", "The Revenant" are all remarkable in the faithful rendering of the spiritual experience or insight. The poet in him has caught the movement at its white heat of experience and has succeeded in casting it into an inspired utterance, the language and the rhythm,—the words and the image,—carrying with it a power of reality with the concreteness of the image. The location of the magnetic mountain is described thus:

"Somewhere beyond the rail-road,
Of reason, south or north,
Lies a magnetic mountain,
Riveting sky to earth".

There is here a positive feeling of the reality of a region of consciousness beyond reason and the concrete image of the Magnetic Mountain makes the experience real endowing the Supra-rational Reality with a power of an irresistible attraction. While developing the poem, the poet in fact brings out the elements that will draw him to this supra-rational Mountain,

"Iron in the soul,
Spirit steeled in fire,
Needle trembling on truth,
These shall draw me there".

As is natural in a great poem, the unity and harmony are throughout maintained—the magnet, iron and steel are all there. Here is the "iron" that is "in the soul". There is perhaps the needle of the compass, conscience, trembling indecisively upon Truth trying to adjust itself in the direction of the Magnetic Mountain. These certainly are some of the elements in man that subject him to the attraction of the supra-rational Magnetic Mountain. The poet has evidently touched the plane of intuitive sight which has brought into his consciousness the symbolic image of the supra-rational Reality as the Magnetic Mountain. The Reality, says the poet further, is not only supra-rational but is beyond time and space, for there:—

"Compass and clock must fail
For space stands on its head there
And time chases its tail".

When he reaches the mountain the poet finds there will be enough girders "to take the leaden strain of a sagging sky" and he hopes to "build right over chaos a cantilever bridge" with the help of the material he will find in that "miraculous mountain".

His second poem, "The Poet" also moves on the plane of intuition where he feels the exaltation of the creative moment and in three brilliant images, each typifying a special process of poetic inspiration on a level higher than the mind, gives us almost the secret of the true poetic creation. First is "the moon's fitful sleep on a clouded bay"; second is "the maiden flight of white swans" coming down upon poet's mind, and third is the "ascent of the poet's consciousness to the height of intuition". Hear what he says about the ascent to the height of intuition, the third image:—

"Oh, on this striding edge,
hare-bell height of calm
Where intuitions swarm
Like nestling gulls and knowledge
Is free as the winds that blow,
A little while sustain me,
Love, rill my answer is heard!
Oblivion roars below,
Death's cordon narrows: but vainly
If I have slipped the carrier word".

This stanza gives us a very faithful description of the poet's experience. The precipitous and precarious height of calm above the ordinary mind would lead him to the "swarms" of "intuition", and to regions of free knowledge, and it is from there that the poet would bring "the carrier-word". The description agrees so completely with that given by Sri Aurobindo of the creation of poetry from over-head inspiration! Really, the poet, here, has "in the forest of rime" plucked "eternity's single leaf".—C. Day Lewis.

Day Lewis is also remarkable in his faith in the Word,—the true poetic creation. The power of the Word is so well-known to the Vedic Seers but here we find a modern poet echoing the faith of the most ancient poets. The whole poem would be too long to reproduce here but it is one of those remarkable poems produced during the war-time which gives us a hopeful vision of the destiny of man. In effect, he says, that the poet who is obliged to live in the present cannot know all the forces at work which produce all kinds of results in that narrow slit of time. Besides, rime carries the stamp of impermanence, so even a catastrophe or colossal suffering may seem shifting and impermanent. In a sense, the dangers of the last world-war were temporary inconveniences to some, but they have left behind many in permanent destitution. In face of millions of refugees obliged to migrate, the poet says:—

"The real migrations,
Millions fated to flock,
Down weeping roads to mere oblivion—strike me
Dumb as a rooted-rock".
And, what a living and revealing image he gives us of the search-light! Says he:—
"I watch when searchlights set the low-cloud smoking Like add on metal".^[^3]
^[^3] Compare Sri Aurobindo's living image.—
"As when a searchlight stabs the Night's blind breast
And dwellings and trees and figures of men appear
As if revealed to an eye in Nothingness".

Sāvitrī, Book II, Canto 5.

He gives us the description of the fear of the whole town under the bombs by two powerful images only, and conveys the poignant tragedy of the war:—

"The roofless old, the child beneath the debris,
How can I speak of these?"

After stating his inability to express his feelings, he affirms his faith in the Word:—

"Yet words there must be, wept on the cratered present,
To gleam beyond it,"—

words born of intense sympathy with the suffering of man, rising not only to a pitch of intensity but to an image of extraordinary beauty! For, here there is not only an intensity of feeling but an inspired utterance in which the spirit and the word expressive of it come fused together under the white heat of poetic alchemy. The expression "cratered present" transfers the bombing from the objective to the subjective world, and the poet's hope that the words expressing his sorrow would gleam—like the splinters of the bomb—into the future does the same. A fine affirmation of the poet's faith in his mission and in the undying power of the Word!

Describing a chamber in the heart in his "Live you by love confined," he uses unconsciously an image of the Gītā, describing the self-gathered state of the soul—"as a lamp in a windless place wavers not"—before the moment of self-realisation. He says about the chamber of heart:—

"There as the candle's beam
Stands firm and will not waver,
Spire-straight, in a close chamber,
As though in a shadowy cave, a
Stalagmite of flame,
The integral spirit climbs
The dark in light for ever".

Live you by love confined

The spirit even though surrounded by darkness ascends to the heights of inner life "in light for ever".

Stephen Spender also gives us remarkable touches of this inward subjective turn and of his perception of the worlds that are subliminal. Dissatisfied with the present European civilisation and condemning it to a well-deserved end, he rises to the vision of the collective soul in a world re-made. If some would say it is communism, it should be added that it is the perception of the inner spiritual reality which is the heart of communism. It is the poet's throbbing identity with the soul of man,—the most downtrodden man—that finds expression here. Says he:—

"Into the image of a heart

That feeds separate functions with blood they need
For what they make, we'll shape the wealth
Of the dispossessed world and let those riches pour
Their fertilizing river delta
Across the starved sand of the peoples".

The image of the wealth of the peoples as a heart feeding and nourishing all the different functions of the body social and enriching the dry starved and unproductive sands—the peoples and turning the sands into a fertilizing delta, is a proper acme to the poet's inspiration which invokes the peoples in the following words:-

"Rise, Will of life in brothers". The physical body serves as a very apt symbol of the body social. In contradiction to the theory of class war as the solution of social problems this symbol brings out the organic nature and interdependence of various social units like limbs of the human body. Rather than conflict it suggests mutual adjustment and co-operation based on a sense of living unity.

His another poem "A Trance" contains an image of human love. From mutual unity attained by the lovers

"Sometimes, apart in sleep, by chance
She falls out of my care alone
Into the chaos of a trance".

The person that moves in the trance goes through suffering and sorrow which is reflected dimly on the physical features of the sleeping partner. Suddenly there is a communication to this world from the world of trance and in her unconsciousness she asks:—

"Who blesses?

Or, 'I am pursued by time', she moans".

And the lover who hears these words "thundering at his heart like stones" says:—

"I watch that precipice of fear
She treads among her naked distresses".

He is perhaps sorry that he cannot participate in the suffering and all the other experiences of her distress which, however strong their unity of love in life, she must bear alone in that inner world. Probably the poet realises the difference, between the several personalities of his beloved and arrives at a deeper knowledge of the complex and mysterious personality of man.

"To that deep care we are committed
Beneath the forests of our flesh
And shuddering scenery of these dreams,
Where unmasked agony is permitted
And bones are bared of flesh that seems;
Our hands, unravelling beauty's mesh,
Meet our real selves, our charms outwitted".

"The forests of the flesh" and the "shuddering scenery" of dreams permits some part of our being to suffer "unmasked agony"; and when the thick curtain of the physical being is removed, one stands face to face with his inner personalities—"real selves" which have lost all the charm which the external being had got. Man contains, like 'Jekil and Hyde' even contradictory personalities within himself and the author hints at their integration by a power of love; that is not important. What is important is the coming out of the subliminal worlds into the world of poetry, with living, concrete and vivid experience which opens out a new realm of the subliminal and the occult to the present-day poetry.

David Gascoyne brings in a symbolic sense of the natural phenomenon with great poetic success. In his 'Snow in Europe' the hush of death that fell on Europe during the last world-war is symbolised by snow and throughout the poem, the poet works out the symbol in such a way as to make the inert operations of Nature capable of carrying a great and living and subjective significance. This is how he describes the fall of the snow symbolising the falling of the bomb:—

"Out of their slumber Europeans spun
Dense dreams: appeasement, miracle, glimpsed flash
Of a new golden era, but could not restrain
The vertical white weight that fell last night
And made their continent a blank".

While in this poem he endows a natural phenomenon with a symbolic significance of human events, in another poem, 'Winter Garden', he makes the natural phenomenon itself a living thing and turns it into a suggestive symbol of man's inner life. He describes "The Winter Garden", perhaps symbolising a desolate heart, as follows:—

"The season's anguish, crashing whirl-wind, ice,
Have passed"—

and yet says the author,

"In this garden there is more strife:

The winter's knife is buried in the earth".

The winter is not visible outside. It has like a knife gone into the very earth. So that,—

"No blossom is reborn. The blue

Stare of the pond is blind", and no one is here to see—

"a restless stranger"

"whose eyes are tired of weeping, in whose breast

a savage sun consumes its hidden day"..

Poems such as these give us some idea of the outlook on seasons and all Nature which finds altogether a new orientation in Sāvitrī where it becomes an organic part of the complex system of worlds and seems to be a new revelation of earthly seasons, and Nature.

George Barker in one of his poems introduces a striking simile of the forest and a successful use of mathematical language to convey his poetical meaning. He almost implies that man as an individual is lovable, but in the mass is abominable. But it is not what he says, but the poetic turn which he gives to the experience and a new way of using the language that we are concerned with:—

"O may I mourn the mathematics of man

Who when alone is lovely as the solitary tree

Evolving existence in an algebra of leaves

Against the thunderstorm and the appalling flash:

He is a magnificent one,

But the many of man makes darkness and deceives

Each other with shadow, so that none can see
The human for the flesh".
The following lines from W. H. Auden:—
"Alone the blue sky arching wide
Two black rocks on either side
On your left, and on your right
In the day, and in the night
We are watching you".

seem to be telling a simple child-like story till we come to grasp the symbolism used by the poet,—the two rocks symbolising time and space, which accompany all operations of human mind. Over and above the use of such symbolism, Auden, like Spender, has the sense of the occult and subliminal levels of being and a perception of their influence on man. In his "In Memorium Ernst Toller" which is a war-poem, he mourns the death of Ernst and feels the inscrutableness of life and says:—

"We are lived by powers we pretend to understand;
They arrange our loves; it is they who direct at the end
The sickness, the enemy bullet, or even our hand.
It is their to-morrow hangs over the earth of the living
And all that we wish for our friends:"^[4]

^[4] Compare—

"Artists minute of the hues of littleness,
They set the mosaic of Life's comedy
Or plan the trivial tragedy of our days,
Arrange the deed, combine the circumstance".
Sāvitrī, Book II, Canto 5.

That man is not the master of his acts, his likes and dislikes and that events on the physical plane are mostly manipulated by subtle powers behind or above the physical is a truth of the inner life of man which is gradually finding its way in the realm of poetic creation.

Peter Yates in his "Invocation" and "Word of Death" gives us the two most characteristic poems embodying the inmost tendency of the new age in which we find the spirit and the form indivisible. This spontaneous movement of making inner and spiritual elements concrete is successfully illustrated here. See how he invokes

"The star of eternal possibles and joy",
—for nothing is impossible to the Divine Eternal—so he prays,—
"vibrate the marble with your kiss".

Probably he invokes the Divine Delight to come down and descend with its Love into the most material level,—the marble—, and make it vibrate to its love. He asks "the star of eternal possibles" to

"aim for the fringe, the thinnest curve
Where strength of possible despairs;
The missing but imagined arc
For which the circle aches,
The vistas waiting to be seen",...

In a situation where "the possible" gives way and the curve becomes thin and weak, he invokes the star to supply "the missing arc",—the crying need—of the circle in the form of some bright vision of the future. The last stanza embodies the most subjective turn and happily makes the inner experience potently objective:—

"O star of mind's dark inwardness,
Prolong the struggle with your force!
By your not being dare to be
More than the eye. can see,
A silence audible with growth".

The last line in which "silence" becomes "audible with growth" is a rare triumph of poetic expression. In his other poem; "The Word of Death" he finds—

"The pure mobility of endless concentration without Name"

—which is stronger than the mobility of thought or of the sex impulse. This nameless concentration, the author says,—

"Let it descend, rest in all thought;

Hear once again

offer Oneness like a bribe,

And haunt the windows of the world

With living's Prisoner imagined free".

In this last stanza, the Oneness offered by Death seems to attract living human beings who really are prisoners of life but imagine themselves free. It is not Death but the Oneness of consciousness or soul that is offered by Death which acts as an attraction. A new way altogether of seeing the phenomenon of people hastening to war and to death!

Edith Sitwell in her poem, "One Day in Spring" speaks of love and its eternity in face of death. She transfers death from the dead beloved to the living one and endows the dead with life of the living. When the lover, who is a "living dead man" cries to his dead beloved to come home, he implores her in the following words:

"The Cold! How shall I bear my heart without its beat,

My clay without its soul?...! am alone—

More cold than you are in your grave's long night

That has my heart for covering, warmth and light".

Throughout the poem, there is a penetration into the occult worlds and an exchange between what is considered dead and the living and yet love affirms its eternity in the following words:

"The waters love the moon, the sun the day,

"Though all the lovers of the world

Grow old, and fail and die—

Yet how should you and I?

For the world was only made that we should love—

O heart, O eyes, O lips that will never grow old".

The very fact of searching behind the phenomenon of death and the acceptance of man's self as free from the bonds of the body, the possibility of the disembodied existence as a subject of poetry has become frequent especially under the stress of the last world-war. It has opened a new realm of experience altogether to the future generations. The same author in "A Song of the Cold" mourns the loss of warmth in the hearts of men which has become a "world's fever". She laments "the ultimate cold within the heart of man". This agrees with David Gascoyne and others who have introduced a similar feeling for the seasons.

In this poem "Colliery Country", Walter Alien feels the

"heavy monotonous beat of the colliery pump" in the

darkness of the night, and then,—

"for the time it takes a match to burn out,

The pump was the heart's thump of the tilting earth,

And die earth a sleeping animal that would wake

One day, the whale that Sinbad walked; and I

Sinbad the parasite"¹

In the presence of that thumping heart in the darkness, the poet feels a terror because it is "an inhuman alien heart". The last turn of the feeling is not a happy one which shows that the poet has not yet acclimatised himself to the presence of the spirit behind material objects.

In many ways very remarkable in voicing the inmost and spiritual tendencies of the new age is the poetry of Herbert Read. He seems to receive through an inner sight powerful images that are capable of expressing directly some spiritual Reality. In a poem which symbolises the three aspects of time,—past, present and future,—he gives a

wonderful insight into the mystery of Time. There is an old man who holds "a severed head" like a lantern in one hand, and says:

"I am the storm, which, sunk in me
For a while evades your senses".

He also embodies, or rather is:

"The living point of all the dark forces of the past", and then says he,

"Yesterday, tomorrow and today

Are in my single glance".

The continuity of the process and the partial view which the mind of man takes about the past, present and future is effectively portrayed in this poem. His other poem "The Mutations of the Phoenix" is openly symbolic. It symbolises the human mind in the process of its rise in the nest of his finite mentality, gradually burning itself up and ending into the golden light of the regions of Reality. Throughout this poem there is a perception of the universal. The eye of the poet is able to penetrate behind the appearances,—even of differences and separation of the physical—and see the One Flame of life, as when he says:

"the blood bums in our limbs with an even flame.

The same sundering flame has burnt the world and

left this crumbling sands

One flame burns many phenomena".

A wonderful compactness in expression and yet it holds a world of significance. It implies the rise of Life from Matter,—some Flame of original Fire burning has left this material world and sands as remnants and given rise to Life that like a flame burns in our very limbs. The line "one flame bums many phenomena" reminds one of the Upanishadic revelation. "It is the one Fire that entered the world and has become every form that we see". The poet continues the figure of the Flame and finds that the Flame burning in the body of man rises in intensity of a mental perception, and then he asks:

"yet how persuade a mind that the thing seen

Is habitant of the cerebral cave

And has elsewhere no materiality?"

All knowledge of man is within his mind and belongs to the mind. The world is a flux and the flux takes place in the mind. He almost makes out that all knowledge is only a mode of the subject, Continuing the same line of feeling he says;—

"Our world is invisible

Till vision

Makes a finite reflection.

Then the world is finite.

Cast in the mould and measure of a finite instrument".

The poet says it is an Infinite Reality of the world which takes the appearance of a finite world due to the limitations of man's instrument of knowledge. And then, as to the origin of this Phoenix that:

"burns spiritually" its ultimate spark is unknowable, because existence continues only so long as the spark lasts. His invocation to the Phoenix to spread its red wings:

"and soaring in the golden light

survey the world"—

is a call to the mind to rise above its limitations to the regions of golden Light that are above. He is among the modernists a very conscious witness of regions of consciousness beyond mind, for he says:

"But the same mind has seen

Beauties beyond its reach, perfections

Never to be attained. Some state of high serenity

Exist beyond the range

Of febrile senses".

His aspiration for the future of mankind also envisages a new age of perfection. About the new age he says:

"New children must be born of gods in

A deathless land",—and they must have

"No flaw in mind or flesh".

His presaging of the age of perfection gives us a glimpse of that vast new world which is native to Sāvitrī George Herbert expresses the organic unity of mankind in a striking and illuminating analogy which not only includes the whole of mankind but extends out to the whole material world.

"Man is all symmetry,

Full of proportions, one limb to another,

And all to all the world besides:

Each part may call the farthest, brother:

For head with foot hath private amity,

And both with moons and tides"

Among young Indian poets who are writing English poetry, Harindranath Chattopadhyaya, Armando Menazes, K. D. Sethna may be considered representative. J. A. Chadwick alias Arjava may be included among them, though an Englishman, on account of his affinity with them in spirit. In his poem the "Errant Life", Sethna touches unusual height and intensity of expression. "This errant life is dear although it dies"—says the poet; to him "human lips are sweet", and although "uncertain" he likes the adventurous spirit of the youth. With the strong bonds binding him to the earth, and yet with an irresistible attraction for the Divine, the poet appeals:

"Sky-lucent bliss, untouched by earthiness!

"If thou desirest my weak self to outgrow

Its mortal longings, lean down from above,

Temper the unborn Light no thought can trace,

Suffuse my mood with a familiar glow".

Pleading man's inability to rise to the Divine, he gives voice to one of the most sincere and powerful aspirations of the human heart, when he says:

"For it is with mouth of clay that I supplicate:

Speak to me heart to heart words intimate,

And all thy formless glory turn to love

And mould thy love into a human face".

The aspiration of the human soul for ascent to the Divine which found a powerful expression in one of the inspired utterances of Whitman and finds intermittent expression in several modernist poets is seen here in Sethna in the new form where the human soul supplicates the Divine to come down on earth. The double strand we find in the great epic Savitri—the ascent of the human soul to the Divine, and the descent of the Divine on earth and a promise of transformation of the earth-nature in a harmonious integral and organic expressions—seems to sum up in a grand orchestral music all the strands that extend far into the future of poetic creation.

How entirely different may be the spirit and the form of new creation can be seen from some of the poems of Chadwick of which we give here one as an example:

"The silent Deep all strewn with stars

Unswayably withholds

A moon to reap the star-fraught ears

That midnight's acre folds;

Through a sickle-blade in the harvest hour

Reap all the stars away,

And the gleamer maid of dawn shall leave

The stark bare field of day.

O Siva-moon be swift and raze

Number and name and form,

Leaving the boon of Wideness bright

And Peace beyond all storm.

In spite of apparent differences in the subject-matter and form of poetry of the modern times, the major trend seems to be clear. It is striving for a subjective expression, direct and unhampered by any conventional considerations of fitness or otherwise of the subject and form of poetry. Often the new poetry deals with the subconscious, dream state,

abnormal regions of man's consciousness, experiences of his vital and sensational being but its highest and greatest reach goes to the perception of the cosmic consciousness, to that of whole of mankind and to the regions of the supra-rational. Its most important and perhaps the most difficult task would be to contact and reveal in poetic form regions of consciousness which are at present super-conscious to man but are potential in him. In the passages quoted from modernist poets in this section one can see that this highest strain finds expression in many of them. What is an occasional inspiration and utterance in modernist lyrical poetry becomes in Sāvitrī an uninterrupted inspired vision, the Word coming out straight from the Spirit. What is lyrical intensity of a point of experience in these forms reaches in Sāvitrī its epic height and grandeur. In "The Future Poetry", Sri Aurobindo has indicated that man in his evolution is moving towards the subjective age and the poet who is the precursor and in his highest function, the prophet, would certainly enter into or ascend those higher regions of consciousness as yet unattained by man. This is what he says:

"And it (poetry of future) will open to and interpret not only man and terrestrial Nature, but other domains also, of our spirit. It will give the key of the worlds of supernature, and allow us to move among the beings and scenes, images and influences and presences of the psychic kingdoms which are near to us behind their dark or luminous curtain and will not be afraid to enter into vaster realms of the self and other universal states and the powers that stand behind our life and soul's eternal spaces. It will do this not merely in a symbol of greated human magnitudes, as the old poets represented the gods, or in hues of romantic glamour or in the far-off light of a mystic remoteness, but with the close directness and reality that comes from intimate vision and feeling, and make these things a part of our living experience". (P. 568)

Sri Aurobindo, The Future Poetry: The Power of the Spirit

Sāvitrī takes as its theme the life of man and the movement of his soul over all the cosmic planes. The vision of the poet is like a search-light, turning its revealing light from plane to plane where it brings into our view worlds of being, unknown to the ordinary gaze, their workings and their influences upon earth and man, and the part they play in the evolution from the Inconscient to the Superconscient. In Sri Aurobindo's poetical expression taken as a whole, the movement towards a universal subjectivism gets released from the entanglements of intellectual theories, the uncanny attraction of the lower vital and the distorted view of the abnormal and flies steadily into the region of the higher inspirational consciousness and from there, views the whole of the cosmos including man, other Cosmic Powers and Nature. The spirit of the creator of Sāvitrī is cosmic, it is a world-builder.[32]

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